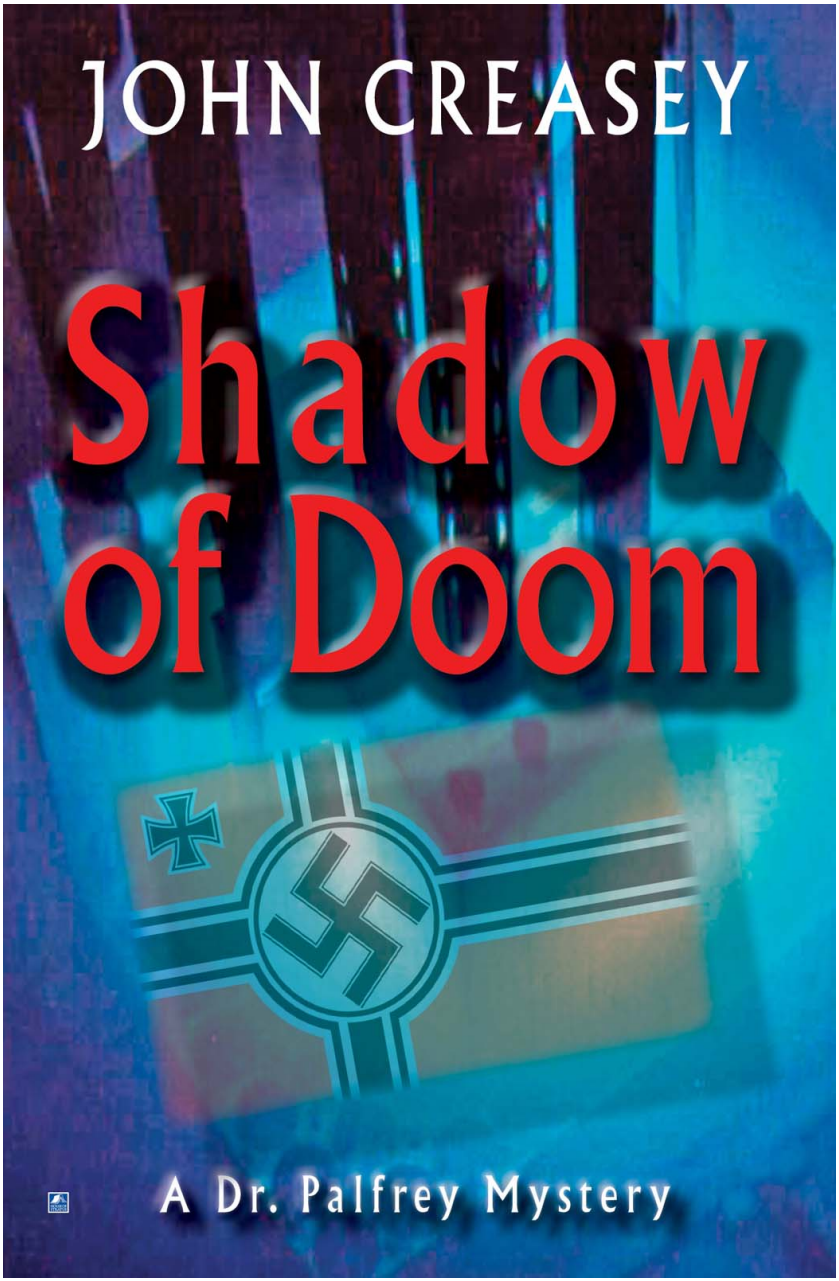
JOHN CREASEY

# Shadow of Doom



A Dr. Palfrey Mystery

# Copyright & Information

## Shadow Of Doom

First published in 1946
© John Creasey Literary Management Ltd.; House of Stratus 1946-2013

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise), without the prior permission of the publisher. Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The right of John Creasey to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted.

This edition published in 2013 by House of Stratus, an imprint of Stratus Books Ltd., Lisandra House, Fore Street, Looe, Cornwall, PL13 1AD, UK.

Typeset by House of Stratus.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library and the Library of Congress.

This is a fictional work and all characters are drawn from the author's imagination.
Any resemblance or similarities to persons either living or dead are entirely coincidental.

www.houseofstratus.com

# About the Author

John Creasey – Master Storyteller - was born in Surrey, England in 1908 into a poor family in which there were nine children, John Creasey grew up to be a true master story teller and international sensation. His more than 600 crime, mystery and thriller titles have now sold 80 million copies in 25 languages. These include many popular series such as *Gideon of Scotland Yard, The Toff, Dr Palfrey and The Baron*.

Creasey wrote under many pseudonyms, explaining that booksellers had complained he totally dominated the 'C' section in stores. They included:

> *Gordon Ashe, M E Cooke, Norman Deane, Robert Caine Frazer, Patrick Gill, Michael Halliday, Charles Hogarth, Brian Hope, Colin Hughes, Kyle Hunt, Abel Mann, Peter Manton, J J Marric, Richard Martin, Rodney Mattheson, Anthony Morton and Jeremy York.*

Never one to sit still, Creasey had a strong social conscience, and stood for Parliament several times, along with founding the *One Party Alliance* which promoted the idea of government by a coalition of the best minds from across the political spectrum.

He also founded the *British Crime Writers' Association*, which to this day celebrates outstanding crime writing. *The Mystery Writers of America* bestowed upon him the *Edgar Award* for best novel and then in 1969 the ultimate *Grand Master Award*. John Creasey's stories are as compelling today as ever.

# SHADOW OF DOOM

Somewhere in Europe there are hidden stores of radium, stores hoarded by the Nazis, supported by a big business syndicate. It is up to Dr. Palfrey to find them – and soon, for he discovers that there is more to the problem than just radium and Nazis. The businessmen, their identities concealed by sinister black masks, aim to bring Europe to an economic standstill – and starvation …

# Chapter One

## Mirage

Van Doorn stood with the cigar jutting from his lips, both hands clenched tightly by his side.

'Sane men see mirages,' Palfrey was saying. 'Great men dream dreams. This would be a worthy dream. Personally, I believe you if you say there is radium in large quantities hidden somewhere in Europe.'

'You *do* believe?'

'Yes,' said Palfrey. 'It is perfectly logical. Radium doesn't disappear. There have been questions in some circles. Where has it gone? There are rumours, ugly rumours. The Russians have helped themselves, the Americans have helped themselves, we have helped ourselves. All of that is nonsense.'

'It is the easy answer to an awkward question,' said van Doorn, 'but I am glad there have been questions, it means that perhaps I shall be believed. There is one difficulty. I am not blind. I have studied the situation closely. Many doctors have reported hidden stores of radium, the Allied authorities have sometimes gone to great trouble to find it, and then found nothing. They become sceptical—but you know that.'

'Yes.' Palfrey nodded.

'For a long time I have suspected that the radium was hidden,' van Doorn went on. 'There was much more at Rotterdam in the autumn of 1944 than when you freed us and took over the hospital. It was the same elsewhere, I heard. There was nothing certain about where it had gone, you understand, but there was suspicion that the Germans had taken it. Yet such a story would not be heeded, there have been many of them. I had to *know*. So I went to Berlin for two days, Palfrey. In Berlin there is von Kriess—you remember him, of course, von Kriess of Berlin?'

'Yes.' Palfrey nodded again.

'He told me that a young doctor, a Nazi student, had been to Rotterdam and taken the radium,' said van Doorn. 'He had protested, knowing how it would be needed. The insolent youth insulted him. The talk we have heard so often—if the Nazis could not have Europe they would destroy it. And von Kriess had heard the same story from other places, too, of systematic pillage, radium stolen from many hospitals and institutions. It was, of course, out of spite, like the destruction of so many hospitals and so much medical equipment. That is *not* a mirage, Palfrey.'

'No.' Palfrey sipped his tea.

'It was deliberate, determined policy,' said van Doorn. 'The Germans knew the importance of radium, knew that our difficulties would be halved if we had access to ample supplies. And they robbed us of it. The story is the same in Vienna, in Budapest, Berlin, Frankfurt, Cologne, even in Paris and Brussels, although more was found there than in the towns which were

liberated much later. And I tell you, Palfrey, this radium can and must be found. Will you help?'

'The question is not will I help, but can I?' said Palfrey. 'And another question: where is the radium? There are a few strong points still held by desperate Nazis, a few mountain fastnesses. They will give us little trouble and will be overrun in due time, but it will be almost impossible to get hold of the radium if it is in one of them. Or in several,' he added.

'I do not care what you say,' said van Doorn. 'It exists, and it must be found.'

'*I'm* not raising objections,' Palfrey protested. 'My influence in high quarters is negligible, but the Marquis of Brett can move even Cabinet Ministers, and has the ear of the Prime Minister.'

'Can we persuade this Marquis to help?' demanded van Doorn, eagerly.

'Yes,' said Palfrey. 'He will help and advise.'

'Who is he?' asked van Doorn.

Palfrey waved his hand. 'Oh, just a friend.'

Undoubtedly the Marquis of Brett was a power behind the scenes. At one time many members of Parliament had considered his power sinister, had believed him a Nazi or Fascist tool. They had said so and been ignored, and had railed against the Government for its dallying with collaborators. Those days had changed. For while it was true that at one time the Marquis had been in close touch with Berlin and Rome, it was also true that he had worked in the closest co-operation with Whitehall – and, later, with Washington and Moscow. While the Nazi leaders thought he might one day be the British Quisling, he had been able to work effectively against them. This, and much of what he did, was disclosed when Berlin discovered the truth, and the Marquis of Brett became a popular figure in England.

The Marquis was the man who had first thought of using secret agents from the Big Three nations together – Russian, American and British – on certain operations inside Europe. And he had selected Palfrey.

A specialist in tubercular diseases, from which so many suffered, Palfrey was also known as a man of courage and resource, despite his mild manner. He had pulled off a near-miracle on his first assignment, and this success had been followed by others equally brilliant. Almost inevitably he had become the leader of that mixed bag of agents in a department called, for record purposes, Z5. They were not always successful. Many of their members had been killed; others wounded and disabled. In fact, of all those who had worked for the Marquis of Brett, only Palfrey, his wife Drusilla, and the Russian, Stefan Andromovitch, had come through without serious injury.

Palfrey had become almost a legend. He had worked in Europe, Africa and Asia, sometimes achieving what was thought impossible, sometimes frankly admitting failure. Throughout it all he remained the rather diffident, amiable, quiet-voiced man whose appearance was so deceptively at odds with his true character. The Press would have lionised him, given half a chance.

Some rumours go into the papers; rarely with his photograph, but sometimes with Drusilla's, who photographed well. But while he did not mind publicity for the successful exploits of Z5, which in war-time were a great boost to public morale, he shunned it for himself. Because van Doorn had heard of his activities he had come to him. If that radium existed, what risks were not worth running to find it?

The taxi pulled up outside the Marquis of Brett's Brierly Place home. Christian, the white-haired butler, greeted Palfrey like an old friend, greeted van Doorn courteously, said that Mrs. Palfrey and the Marquis were waiting, and led them upstairs.

Brett was sitting at a large desk in a vast room. Two pillars supported the ceiling; they were of a reddish brown, mottled stone. The furniture was mahogany, brightly polished. Books lined the walls almost to the high ceiling. The tapestry curtains picked out the colours of the furniture and the mottled pillars.

Brett's head and shoulders were reflected in the highly polished desk, on which stood a silver inkstand, a blotting-pad with silver corners, and a telephone. He rose as they entered, a small, white-haired man with a benign expression, a handsome man, who carried himself well in spite of his seventy-odd years. At times there was a touch of hauteur about him – some called it arrogance – but it was absent as he shook hands with Palfrey and van Doorn.

Drusilla Palfrey was sitting by the side of the desk when they entered. Now she, too, stood up. Nearly as tall as Palfrey, she held herself very erect so that she looked taller than he. She was dressed in a plain, dark-green suit, cut on severe lines, and wore a wide-brimmed felt hat of the same shade of green. She was dark-haired; most men looked at her twice; and Palfrey adored her.

When they were seated, Palfrey said:

'Professor van Doorn has brought me quite a story, Marquis. You'd be annoyed if I kept it to myself.'

Brett looked sceptical.

'That's true,' protested Palfrey. 'In a manner of speaking, it's up our street. I mean yours. Title— "Hunt the Radium". How does it sound?'

'Radium?' repeated Brett, looking at van Doorn.

Drusilla was not looking at the Dutchman, but at Palfrey. There was a gleam in his eyes which she had not known since he had been persuaded, against his will, to return to Wimpole Street and take up ordinary life again.

'In large quantities,' said van Doorn.

'Let me tell the story,' said Palfrey. 'You put me right if I go wrong.' He smiled apologetically at van Doorn, stole a sidelong glance at Drusilla, and then talked in short, crisp sentences, putting emphasis where it was most needed. He did not suggest that there might be doubt about the existence of the radium. He spent a few minutes explaining, as if to someone who could not understand the magic in the word, what 'radium' meant to ravaged Europe, and he finished on a hopeful note.

‘The time element is important. Weeks won’t greatly matter, but months will. January and February are bad months, likely to be the crisis months in Europe. The general position of drugs, equipment and hospital accommodation will be bad enough, but the radium shortage will probably be the most harmful. Can we do something by Christmas, do you think?’

‘We must!’ cried van Doorn.

‘The question is—*can* we?’ insisted Palfrey, looking hopefully at Brett, who was playing with a quill pen. Somehow it seemed fitting for him to use such a pen.

‘An expedition would need the right people, plenty of money and a general visa to move freely about Europe,’ said Brett.

‘Would anyone deny you that visa?’ demanded van Doorn.

‘Some might try,’ said Brett, ‘but I think we could get over that difficulty.’ His manner was reassuring, and van Doorn looked delighted, as if he realised that Palfrey had been right, they would get help from the Marquis. ‘Getting the expedition together and equipped might be difficult. It is so hard to say what equipment will be needed,’ Brett added.

‘This is not an expedition to the Arctic Circle,’ said van Doorn, gustily.

‘No, but in some ways it is more difficult,’ said Brett.

‘Not on the score of equipment,’ said Palfrey. ‘We could probably get that as we went along. If not, we could have it flown to us from England, or the United States. Lend-lease has done many lesser jobs.’

Brett laughed. ‘Before we can call on such unlimited help we would have to convince everyone concerned that it was not a hare-brained notion, that there were real prospects of success. It is difficult to present to anyone a complete and satisfying outline of where the search would begin, where it would end, and what is likely to happen in the meantime. If we could say where the radium is we would have a stronger case. I think—if we *are* going to try to find it—it would best be a well-equipped private expedition with Government approval.’

‘Ah!’ exclaimed Palfrey.

‘If!’ cried van Doorn, scornfully, but there was a new light in his eyes. Palfrey and Brett kept saying ‘we’, as if they were already decided on the expedition and ready to take part in it.

Drusilla was sitting back in her chair and looking very hard at Palfrey. He carefully avoided her gaze.

‘And as a private expedition it would need financing,’ said the Marquis.

‘Find us a philanthropic millionaire with a bent for taking risks,’ said Palfrey. ‘Can do?’

‘I might,’ said the Marquis, ‘and in any case I think we could get the money from different people. It need not all come from one source. The most difficult thing will be personnel.’

‘There are *thousands* of men already tired of inaction,’ said van Doorn; ‘that will not be difficult.’

‘We need the right men,’ said the Marquis. ‘Palfrey, for one, if he were not so busy. Adromovitch, if he were not in Moscow. Bruton, if the Federal

Bureau would release him. It will take time to find the people who are able and free to help, Professor.'

Now van Doorn was looking at Palfrey, as well as Drusilla, and Palfrey put his hands on the arms of his chair and rose to his feet.

'First find the people, then the money, then—'

'Will *you* lead this expedition?' asked van Doorn, and there was tension in his voice.

# Chapter Two

## Aerodrome

On the airfield the engine was warming up, and they could feel the wind from the four great propellers. Mechanics, dwarfed by the size of the machine, were still swarming about the passenger transport. The engines were floodlit, lights shone from the aerodrome buildings and from the restaurant-cum-waiting-room.

Van Doorn and Palfrey stood near the door, huddled in heavy overcoats.

'How long will it be before you start?' asked van Doorn.

'I don't know,' said Palfrey. 'Within a fortnight.'

'As soon as that?' Van Doorn's voice was raised in excitement.

'I hope so,' said Palfrey, 'and we shall come and see you first. This and that will be done meanwhile. Brett will start inquiries, there will be some put in hand today. Doctors and surgeons in the German hospitals will be questioned, and we might get something from them. If we get further confirmation of your story, that will go a long way towards getting us full Government blessing. Secret service has its uses, even today.'

'Yes,' said van Doorn. 'Thanking you is difficult, Palfrey. You know what I feel.'

'Why thank me?' asked Palfrey. 'Thank yourself, you started it. With the faith that moves mountains. Hallo, there's an exodus of mechanics.'

In the floodlit field he could see the mechanics leaving the huge machine. Soon a voice through the loudspeaker was calling on passengers to embark. There was a full company, every seat was booked. Palfrey walked with van Doorn to the foot of the lowered steps, and they shook hands. Then at the top of the steps van Doorn turned and looked down – and Palfrey tossed something up to him and said:

'Catch! You want these.'

Van Doorn clutched at a box of half-Coronas.

Palfrey stood aside and let the other passengers say their farewells. It was cold. Dawn was breaking, but the artificial light seemed to make the sky dark by contrast. The last passenger climbed in, some of the crew followed, there were more commands through the loudspeaker, and the little party near the aircraft backed away. The machine moved; it became airborne; it disappeared towards the eastern sky. Before it was out of sight the sky had become brighter there, and they saw it, a tiny dark spot, against the brittle paleness of a clear dawn.

Palfrey turned towards the car-park.

The lights had been turned off now, and there was not yet enough daylight for him to see anything but vague figures moving here and there. Some cars were driven off, men and women were illuminated clearly by the headlamps. His own car was parked near the far corner of the car-park, and

he could see its outlines. It was a Mercedes-Benz, only recently removed from its war-time garage, powerful, nearly 'new', a Goliath among the Davids there. Two or three men were walking away from it, as if they had been drawn towards such magnificence set among the lesser ten and twelve horsepower cars. Palfrey thought nothing of that until an attendant suddenly appeared near the gate and gripped the arm of a man who had come from his car.

'Just a moment, sir, please.'

In a moment everything went topsy-turvy, for the man who had been stopped dragged his arm away and smashed his fist into the attendant's face. The attendant did not utter a sound, but staggered back. A woman exclaimed and a man lunged forward to stop the assailant. He too was struck with a savage blow, and fell.

'I say!' protested Palfrey, for someone bumped into him. There was confusion, people moving in all directions, men shouting, men running, Another attendant made an attempt to catch the violent one, and this time a little fellow prevented the man from being caught.

Palfrey saw the little fellow shoot out a leg and trip the attendant up. The main quarry got clear away and raced towards the main gates, where a car was waiting. The little fellow seemed to stay and watch events, taking his chance. Palfrey drew near him, and murmured: 'Neat, wasn't it?'

'What do you mean?' demanded the little fellow, violently. 'I didn't do—'

'Anything,' said Palfrey.

The little fellow delivered a short-arm jab, nicely calculated to hit Palfrey on the chin. Palfrey moved his head and swung his left fist. He connected. Next moment he was hugging the little fellow closely to him, and a crowd had collected about them. Airfield attendants broke through the crowd. The little man was bellowing protests, he would have the law on them, he wasn't going to be set upon, he was a most indignant citizen. Yet Palfrey persuaded the attendants that he should be taken to the Superintendent's office.

That was after the car which had been waiting in the road outside had been driven off, but before the excitement was over.

The little man was a red, round-faced fellow, flashily dressed. He appeared to be sizzling with indignation, but there was fright in his eyes. The Superintendent was a leathery middle-aged ex-R.A.F. man of the kind who would stand no nonsense, not even from distinguished visitors, and Palfrey stood aside while the attendants told their story.

The Superintendent turned cold eyes towards the little man.

'None of you saw this gentleman?' His 'gentleman' was horribly derisive.

'No, sir,' said the attendants, in unison.

The cold eyes were turned towards Palfrey.

'You think you saw him trip up one of the attendants, sir?'

'No,' said Palfrey, and the cold eyes looked startled. 'No thinking about it. He did. With malice. But for him, the man who first grew violent and then ran would not have escaped. Your attendants were very quick.'

The attendants drew themselves up proudly.

‘The beggar got away,’ growled the Superintendent, and the attendants wilted.

‘Half-light, determined gentlemen, no wonder,’ said Palfrey. ‘Take it from me, please, that this individual prevented your men from doing their job properly.’ Until then he had looked so mild and apologetic that his air of authority seemed to come out of a box. ‘And give me a few minutes in private, will you?’

‘I insist on being released!’ howled the little man. ‘This is outrageous! I’ll go straight to the police—’

‘Your truest word,’ said Palfrey. ‘You will.’

The little man was silenced for the time being, and the Superintendent’s brows met together in a frown which was partly of bewilderment. This Palfrey puzzled him.

‘Well, I can spare you a few minutes, Mr. Palfrey.’

‘Dr. Palfrey,’ smiled Palfrey. ‘Thanks very much. While we’re talking, could one of your men go and look at my car?’

‘*Your* car? It’s all right, isn’t it?’

‘That’s what I want to know,’ said Palfrey. ‘It’s the horrid sight in the corner. Mercedes-Benz.’

‘Why, sir!’ exclaimed an attendant, ‘the man who got away was doing something to it, that’s why I stopped him.’

He was excited and pleased with himself, and the other attendants were so intrigued that the little man saw a chance of running away, and seized it. He rushed to the door, pushing one attendant aside, flung the door open and raced along the passage. Attendants ran after him. There was the sound of a collision and a crash of crockery and metal. After a pause that lasted only for a few seconds, but seemed an age, the Superintendent gave a long-suffering sigh, and said:

‘That was my breakfast.’

‘Sacrifice in a good cause,’ said Palfrey, for when they went into the passage the little man was on the floor, looking dazed, and a massive steward was glaring down at him with a murderous glint in his eye. On the floor were pieces of cups and saucers, bacon, scrambled egg, toast and the usual etceteras of a substantial breakfast, including coffee, which spread sluggishly from wall to wall and smelt most fragrant.

‘He won’t get away again,’ said the Superintendent, and gave the necessary orders. It appeared that a corner of the tray had caught the little man in the eye, and temporarily blinded him. He was gasping and moaning piteously, but received no sympathy. The Superintendent watched him taken away, then looked at Palfrey. ‘Breakfast for two?’

‘That’s handsome of you,’ said Palfrey. ‘Yes, please.’

‘In the meantime you can tell me what it is all about,’ said the Superintendent. ‘And, as we’ll have to wait a quarter of an hour, we may as well go and see what happened to your car – if anything.’

‘Happy thought,’ said Palfrey. ‘As for what it’s all about, I don’t know. Except that they appeared to have evil designs on my car. I’m fond of that

car. Also, I have been attacked before. Some would say an H.I. Department, and some would say nothing at all.' He beamed.

As they stepped into the frosty October air the Superintendent's eyes stopped being cold. They glowed, and he said, '*That* Palfrey!' – as if it explained everything. The change relieved Palfrey, but the sight of the little canister in his car did not. It was small and round, like a cycle oil can, and everybody handled it with great care. Neither he nor the Superintendent guessed what it contained, but they were sure that it was in some way lethal.

'So someone is after you in England,' said the Superintendent, over breakfast of crisp, hot bacon and two eggs apiece, together with other things which did not normally appear on the breakfast menu at the restaurant. 'I must say I envy you, Palfrey.'

'Envy!' Palfrey was shocked. 'I nearly made a nasty blotch on the Great West Road; that's no fit subject for envy.' He talked fairly freely of the past, and the Superintendent rightly felt that he was privileged. Presently the police arrived, and the little man, who had given the name of Clarkson, was taken away, protesting again, and with a remarkably colourful eye to bear him out when he complained that he had been assaulted. The police also took charge of the mysterious canister, with a promise to treat it with the utmost respect and to await instructions for its disposal.

In the course of the next few hours, items of news trickled in. First, Clarkson would not talk, and denied everything. Second, the canister contained a German explosive which would go off if subjected to much vibration, as near a car engine. Third, Clarkson's fingerprints were found on the canister, but Clarkson still denied everything. Finally, in the early afternoon, when Palfrey was at Wimpole Street, Brett telephoned and told him that although van Doorn had arrived safely at Rotterdam airport he had not reached his home nor the University.

The Dutchman was still missing twenty-four hours later.

# Chapter Three

## The Marquis Obtains Recruits

Dias had small feet, and his trousers were cut so perfectly that the line from his waist to his ankle was absolutely straight, although it tapered off. It gave him a top-heavy appearance, for he had powerful shoulders and a big head. Bright eyes, dark brown in colour, lit up at the sight of Palfrey.

'My dear Doctor—a *thousand* thanks,' he said, effusively, extending a hand and clasping Palfrey's. 'I know the value of your time, I know that you have scarcely the opportunity to see all the patients who flock to your rooms. To find time for me among your illustrious patients is an honour indeed— a *great* honour,' he continued, and lifted his eyes towards the ceiling, 'and one which gives me hope.'

'I'm so glad,' murmured Palfrey.

He opened his eyes wide; it was probably not the reception he had expected.

'Sit down, please,' said Palfrey.

'May I continue to stand?' asked Dias, taking a cigar-case out. 'And will you permit me to—'

'If you don't mind, no smoking in here,' said Palfrey. 'Some patients don't like it. Others can't stand it. The effect of smoke on certain stomachs is distressing.' He beamed, and looked at Dias's stomach.

He did not like Señor Fernandez y Dias, but he could not say on what he based his dislike, for the Castilian's was not an unpleasant face. It was a clever one, thought Palfrey. The mouth was small and red, like van Doorn's in colour, he was black-haired and clean-shaven, and had powdered after shaving. His eyes were fine, with lashes which would have been more becoming on a woman. His nose was a little prominent, but it was a well-shaped nose, and in spite of the fat jowl it was impossible to disguise the fact that he had a sizable chin. A handsome and imposing man, who seemed startled when asked not to smoke, but quickly covered his confusion.

'I come on a mission of such great importance that I cannot too heavily emphasise it,' said Dias. 'Dr. Palfrey, I have travelled far, I am a man of many acquaintances, on my country's behalf I have had the honour of meeting many famous men, and this—I do assure you—this is an honour greater than any hitherto bestowed on me!'

'Oh, please,' said Palfrey, shrinking.

'But it is, sir, I insist that it is,' boomed Dias. 'I am standing' – his voice was low, there was a quiver in it, and his chin seemed to quiver in sympathy – 'before the *greatest* specialist in the treatment of tuberculosis *in the world.* Please!' He raised his hand, palm outwards. It was a small, plump, white hand, and he wore three rings. 'There is no doubt that I am right. In New York, in Paris, in London—everywhere I go, everywhere I am told—Dr.

*Palfrey* might help you, there is none other.'

'If I can,' murmured Palfrey.

'You are so good, so very good,' said Dias, humbly. 'I was told of your courtesy, also. My dear Doctor, I come because I am in great distress. Not for myself—I would ask no such favour for myself, please believe me, please. I ask for another, for the wife of our illustrious President.' He bowed.

'Oh,' said Palfrey, and found himself trying to think of the name of the then President of Castilia. There had been several changes in recent months, and he had not been able to keep pace with them. There were suspicions that the purge of Nazi sympathisers, announced with such a blowing of trumpets early that year, had not been as complete as it was pretended. Castilia was still the Awful Child of South America, rated low by many politicians and journalists; governments, of late, had been chary of passing comment on Castilia's internal affairs.

'She is so beautiful a woman, so gentle, so long-suffering,' said Dias, softly. 'If only it were possible for her to come here, to stand beside me, you would understand the beauty, the charm, the magnetism of the President's wife.'

'You make it very clear,' murmured Palfrey.

'Thank you!' boomed Dias, suddenly enlivened. 'You are understanding, kind, and you raise my hopes. The President's wife, Dr. Palfrey, is ailing! From this dread scourge which only you have mastered. She cannot travel. Specialists from the United States, from other countries, from all over the world,' he went on extravagantly, 'have tried, have done their best, have failed. It is said that she has no more than six months to live—six *months,* Dr. Palfrey. You—and you alone—might save her.'

Palfrey said: 'It is so difficult. I have so many other patients in this country.'

'I know,' said Dias, humbly. 'The decision must be yours. I am waiting on your word, my dear Doctor.'

'*Very* nice of you,' said Palfrey. 'It could not be for' – he paused – 'two weeks or more.'

'But' – Dias's eyes rounded, blazed, he stepped forward and clasped Palfrey's hand – 'after that, you *will* come?'

'No promises yet,' said Palfrey. 'I will try. Will you give me a day or two to see whether I can make arrangements?'

'Gladly!' cried Dias. 'Gladly!' He seemed close to tears. 'You will never know how you have inspired me, never know how you have lifted up my heart. I believe that you will come. I believe that you will allow nothing to prevent you, I am convinced of it—I shall pray for it,' added Dias, unexpectedly. 'May I, then, wait upon you at this hour in two days' time, for your decision?'

'Yes,' said Palfrey, and smiled.

# Chapter Four

## The Marquis Finds the Money

Lyme's was a small and exclusive chop-house not far from the *Lanchester*. They met there at half past one, and were escorted to a table by a venerable, soft-voiced, waiter, who hovered about them and made much of them, whispered promises and stole away. Lyme's was remarkable in so far as there was always room for just another one or two patrons of long standing. There were mysterious doors leading to mysterious rooms, alcoves sheltered by heavy curtains, much red plush, a great variety of old prints on the walls, prints which meant nothing to the casual observer but much to habitués of Lyme's. All the prints were friends, all the waiters were friends, a new face above a spotless white shirt-front was enough to cause comment. No one ever raised his voice at Lyme's; somehow even the crowded little bar was quiet, but just as friendly.

Palfrey looked about the room. He had come to Lyme's chiefly because among the regular patrons were eminent gentlemen from the Foreign Office and the War Office, in fact from Whitehall in general. The Marquis of Brett was often there.

'Hallo,' said Palfrey, 'there's Bobby.'

Drusilla looked round, noting that his voice was brighter. Two middle-aged men who contrived to look young, lean of figure and gay of face, had entered and were being ushered towards another miraculously vacant table. One was fair, the other dark. The fair one was Mr. Robert Fairweather, who had once been in a position to tell many secrets of Moscow, Teheran, Yalta and Berlin. Bobby had a bright and roving eye, and looked the last man to be the repository of State secrets. His friend was a stranger to Palfrey.

Palfrey caught the fair man's eye.

Bobby waved, leaned forward and murmured to his friend, and sauntered over. As if by magic a chair was placed behind him and he sat down, although he could not have seen the chair put into position.

'Judging from your expression, you wanted a word in my ear,' he said, 'and I can give you five minutes, old chap. Can't desert the Old School any longer than that.' He grimaced. 'Fellow with a son wants a sinecure at the F.O.: the least I can do is to give him lunch and tell him that sinecures exist no longer. Shoot.' Having given that command, Bobby did some more shooting himself. 'I see you can't keep your face out of the picture papers, old chap. Shameful vanity. It wasn't even a good photograph. What's this about going on the old travels again? I've heard whispers. Special authority for *the* Dr. Palfrey.'

'His Excellency Señor Fernandez y Dias to you,' said Palfrey.

'Don't hobnob with His Excellency,' said Bobby. He dabbed with a table-napkin at the soft brown foam on his lips. 'Nasty piece of machinery

altogether. In Europe on some special mission. I wouldn't trust him as far as his watch-chain stretches across his waistcoat. Friend of yours?' he added, in sudden alarm.

'A great friend,' said Palfrey. 'He offered me all the riches of the Andes if I will go to Castilia to heal the President's wife.'

'*Wife,*' said Bobby, and looked at Drusilla. 'Forgive your husband's innocence. His Excellency the President of Castilia, just now, has no wife. But he has a harem, I'm told.'

'What's his name?' asked Palfrey.

'This ignorance,' said Bobby, sadly. 'Bruno.'

'Really?' asked Drusilla.

'His Excellency Señor So-and-So Such-and-Such Bruno,' declared Bobby. 'There's no doubt of it. I don't know how long he will be President. Don't go. He probably thinks you're a surgeon and wants you to be at hand to take out the bullets before it can be said that he has died from his wounds. Someone will, of course, some day shoot at him. But this is fiction,' said Bobby, 'all but the name. I'm sorry about my Old School. Nothing I would like better than to gaze dreamily into Drusilla's eyes. Does Sap ever tell you about your eyes, Drusilla?'

'Occasionally,' said Drusilla.

'Then he *is* a Sap. They should be a subject for breakfast, luncheon, tea and dinner, cocktails, liqueurs—what have I forgotten, there should be seven.'

'Elevenses,' said Drusilla, gravely.

'And clever, too,' marvelled Bobby. 'I take it you want *to* know whether one of Bruno's beauties has T.B., Sap?'

'Please,' said Palfrey.

'Nothing guaranteed,' said Bobby, 'but I'll try. Delicate subject, you know. Touchy people, these South Americans. Few are such rogues as His Excellency Señor Fernandez y Dias, however. The man has a reputation for chicanery second to none. Secret missions are his speciality, and I did hear say that he had a scale of charges. Mission to Washington, 1000 silver dollars; to London, 10,000—look what it costs to travel— to Madrid before the end of the war, a million, more or less; to Berlin also before the end of the war, billions! A clever man, a dangerous man, and he's never yet been caught out. But he catches a lot of people. Will you be at home tonight?'

'Yes,' said Palfrey.

'Thanks,' said Bobby, and finished his stout. He rose, and the chair was taken away from him. 'Be sorry for me,' he said, and sauntered back, smiling his apologies at the solitary figure of the Old School.

It was three o'clock before they left Lyme's. Immediately they reached the flat they were off again, for Drusilla's maid was waiting for them with a message: the Marquis of Brett would like to see them as soon as possible. That suggested further progress. It was all going swimmingly, thought Palfrey; his doubts and hesitation had gone, he had almost forgotten the consulting rooms. In the visit of Dias there had been an irresistible

challenge.

Brett was in a downstairs room, small, charming, displaying some rare and very valuable pieces of Sheraton. In that room he rested most afternoons, but if he had been asleep he hid the traces well.

'News?' asked Palfrey, almost too eagerly.

'I don't think you'll have any need to worry about the money,' said the Marquis. 'Lumsden is interested.'

That was like the Marquis. Few preliminaries, just a simple sentence or two which said a great deal. The name 'Lumsden' conjured up a vision of a big, gruff-voiced man, a manufacturer of internal-combustion engines who had worked himself up from being an apprentice in a small engineering shop to a controller of many millions. Steadfastly he refused a knighthood and greater honours, constantly he reviewed worthy causes and gave much money to them. A solid, stolid Midlander who stood no nonsense.

'Wonderful!' exclaimed Drusilla.

'He would like to see you, Sap, this afternoon if you can manage it,' said Brett.

'*If!*' cried Palfrey. 'Where?'

'At his house,' said Brett. 'Drusilla had better stay and tell me what has been happening this morning. Something has, I know or your eyes wouldn't be quite so bright.'

Palfrey left Drusilla and went by taxi to Lumsden's house which was in Grosvenor Place, a tall, grey, drab building, the exterior giving no hint of the magnificence inside. Lumsden did not hesitate to enjoy the advantages that money could bring him. He was a widower with a daughter and two sons, one of them with a reputation for fast living.

On the way Palfrey was too absorbed in contemplation of getting Lumsden's financial backing to think much of what Bobby Fairweather had told him, but it was at the back of his mind. He was not really surprised that Dias had frequently taken special missions to Axis countries during the war. Many of the missions were suspect, but few people knew exactly what had transpired. That they had to do with the building up of large fortunes for Axis leaders was the most popular theory, and probably that was not far wrong.

In his study, Lumsden took Palfrey's hand in a powerful grip. Palfrey, who looked as if he had a limp handshake, responded with one as powerful. Lumsden's grip relaxed and he smiled.

'I've often heard of you, Dr. Palfrey,' he said. 'Sit down, man, make yourself at home.' He pushed cigars and cigarettes across a black-topped table, and sank into an easy chair. He was dressed in Harris tweeds and looked shaggy of hair and eyebrows. He had shaved badly, and there was a cut near his right ear. Deep-set eyes seemed to penetrate to Palfrey's thoughts. It was easy to understand this man's success. 'Now tell me all about it,' he said, when Palfrey had lit a cigarette.

The Palfrey who answered was the Palfrey of the consulting-room, crisp, decisive, allowing no doubt. The radium was there, but it could not be

expected that the Government would finance the expedition to obtain it until they felt convinced of its existence and sure that there was a reasonable chance of finding it. The cost of the expedition could not be calculated in advance, and he would not like to venture an estimate.

He talked for five minutes, judging that enough for Lumsden, whose face fit up with a smile when he finished.

'Thank you, Palfrey. Ay, it's good to hear a man who knows what he's talking about. The Government *should* back you, but we won't go into that, I know they won't. I will—on one condition.'

'To what limit?' asked Palfrey.

'I'll set no limit.'

'That should make a condition easy to bear,' said Palfrey.

Lumsden laughed. 'You're blunt, Palfrey, though you don't look it. Now I've a shock for you, and I don't think you'll like it. I want you to take my son along with you.'

Palfrey kept a poker-face; but his hand strayed to his hair.

'Which one?' he asked.

'Charles,' said Lumsden, and added: 'The wild one.' His eyes were smiling, but behind the smile Palfrey thought he sensed the old man's regret that he had to call either of his sons 'the wild one.' He felt quite sure, too, that Lumsden doubted whether the condition would be accepted.

'Why wish this on to him?' Palfrey asked.

'Or why wish him on to you?' said Lumsden, 'It will do him good, Palfrey. He's a fool in some ways. He's young—or youngish. Twenty-six. He spent most of the war in the Middle East, behind the lines, and he got soft. He wants hardening. I think the right stuff is in him—I'm talking to you,' Lumsden added, 'as a doctor. About Charles.'

'Of course,' said Palfrey, 'but if I take him, my friends must know all there is to know about him. I can't keep details back. He might be the weak link.'

'Ay, tell them, but only them,' said Lumsden. 'Well?'

'I'll have to see him,' said Palfrey.

'I'll tell him to come to you,' said Lumsden.

'Does he know what you have in mind?'

Lumsden gave his deep laugh again. 'I've told him nothing except that you need some young men with time to spare and who can speak several languages,' he said, 'and he can *talk* in a good many. I think he can rough it. I want to know,' went on the millionaire, 'what he can stand and whether he has a breaking-point, and I'm prepared to pay all your expenses to find out.'

'It seems fair,' said Palfrey. 'Supposing we find the radium?'

'Now, watch yourself,' said Lumsden, growling; 'I want no return for my money except the truth about Charles. I'm after no interest on outlay or share of profits. You ought to know better than that.'

'I must be sure,' said Palfrey.

'Yes, yes,' said Lumsden. 'All right, Palfrey. You won't have much time to spare. I won't detain you.'

'Let's not go too fast,' said Palfrey. He took another cigarette, then leaned

back in his chair and was lost in it. 'Your son might be helpful in more ways than one. He will be exposed to danger on the Continent, he might be exposed to some before we start.'

'Ay,' said Lumsden, drawing his brows together. 'How?'

Palfrey said: 'If he joins us, then I would like a story put out in the Press. That he's coming with me on a mysterious special mission. I can get it in tomorrow morning, and for two days he might, like me, be a marked man. Also he *might* be approached by strangers who are not well disposed towards us. Am I clear?'

'He'll not *betray* you,' said Lumsden.

'Will you accept the risk for him?' asked Palfrey. 'He isn't used to this work. If he is looking out for trouble he might betray the fact unwittingly. If he's approached by other people, innocence will serve a better purpose than knowledge.'

Lumsden was silent for a long time, and then he said, quietly, with a gentle smile: 'Do what you will, Palfrey.'

'Danger notwithstanding ?'

'Ay.'

Palfrey said: 'It's a pity you're not able to come yourself, sir.'

Lumsden was still chuckling when Palfrey left, and Palfrey was smiling. The smile grew set as he walked across Hyde Park Corner. There was a great risk in taking a man who was inexperienced in such affairs. Charles Lumsden might become a burden, might need protecting, might put the brake on them at a time when without him they could move quickly. Yet it had taken Brett some time to find a sponsor; that meant that not many people were willing to risk the money.

It was not easy to reach a decision.

He went back to Brierly Place and told Drusilla and Brett. Drusilla was in two minds; Brett turned the scales by saying that if Palfrey received a good impression of the man he should take him.

Palfrey regarded the Marquis owlishly. 'That's fair, I suppose. Or is it? Are you putting something across me, Marquis?'

'My dear fellow!' protested Brett.

The answer was not really an answer, and was certainly not satisfying. There was more in Brett's mind than he chose to discuss. It might be of little significance, yet Palfrey was uneasy. Why should Brett keep anything back? Why add even a little to a mystery already deep enough?

'It's probably my imagination,' thought Palfrey.

'So it's up to me,' he said to Drusilla. 'We're going to have a busy night tonight, my sweet!'

Charles Lumsden was due to call at the Chelsea flat at half past six. Bobby Fairweather was not likely to arrive until after dinner.

It was a fine afternoon, warmer than it had been for some days, and they walked to Chelsea. Palfrey kept a watchful eye about him, but did not think that they were followed. At Victoria he bought an evening paper, glanced at the *Stop Press,* and stopped in his tracks. Drusilla looked down, and read:

*Body of Dutch Surgeon Piet van Doorn found in the estuary of the Schelde in early hours this morning.—Reuter.*

There was nothing they could usefully say.

Charles Lumsden surprised them.

He was short and stocky and looked in good condition. His eyes were the same bright grey as his father's, and had something of the same penetrating directness. He was dressed well, with a touch of exaggeration at the shoulders and the waist, but he was not the feckless type Palfrey had feared and expected. He showed a genuine curiosity. The Old Man had let out one or two intriguing oddments, and rather wanted him to string along with Palfrey. The Old Man probably thought he needed to be taken away from the fleshpots for a bit, and he, Charles, would not deny that. The smile which accompanied the admission was frank and friendly.

Palfrey told him the story, omitting only the word 'radium'. He made mystery of the thing they were looking for, a mystery which seemed to amuse Charles.

'It sounds all right,' said Charles, when Palfrey had finished. 'This isn't going to be a pleasure cruise, though, is it?'

'Not exactly,' said Palfrey.

'Is it tied up with the business in the papers?' asked Charles. 'I mean, you and van Doorn. They pulled the old boy out of the River Schelde, didn't they?' He was quite serious, there was nothing flippant about this 'old boy' as there was about the Old Man.

'It's probably connected with that,' said Palfrey.

'I thought so,' said Charles. 'And I expect the Old Man rang you up and persuaded you to take me along for the hardening process. The question is, am I your man?'

'The question is whether you'll come,' said Palfrey.

'Yes,' said Charles.

They shook hands on it, and Palfrey dispensed drinks.

It was obvious that Drusilla was also well impressed.

Charles left when it was practically dark. Palfrey saw him to the front door, and when he had turned into the street, went after him. In the gloom he saw a shadowy figure moving in Charles's wake, but he could not get close enough for a clear view. He continued to walk to the end of the street. Charles turned right, so did the shadowy figure.

At half past nine there was no sign of Bobby Fairweather, which was disappointing. Just as the half-hour struck the telephone rang, and Palfrey heard Old Lumsden's voice.

'I've been waiting to hear from one of you,' said Lumsden. 'Is Charles still with you?'

'No,' said Palfrey, and felt the first tremor of alarm.

'He hasn't come back here,' said Lumsden.

‘He told me he would go straight back and tell you that we had clinched the deal,’ said Palfrey.

‘I see,’ said Lumsden, and did not speak for some time. ‘I see, Palfrey. I hope nothing’s happened to the boy.’ There was another pause. ‘Well, I can’t say I wasn’t warned. Have you any idea where he might be?’

‘No,’ said Palfrey, ‘none at all. If he doesn’t turn up soon I’ll make inquiries.’

When he rang off he took a coin from his pocket and flicked it absently into the air. Drusilla had heard enough to know that Charles had not reached home, and the same thought was in her mind as in Palfrey’s: that he had been waylaid.

Palfrey was still tossing up the coin when the front-door bell rang.

# Chapter Five

## The Remarkable Adventure of Charles Lumsden

'Hallo,' said Bobby Fairweather. 'I turn up, you see. Better late than in the morning. I have been delving deep, as per request—also,' he added with a grin, 'as per instructions received on, I believe, the instigation of your pal the Marquis. I never know what it's safe to say to you people, your friends are so high in the political heavens. Thanks.' He sat down in an easy chair and stretched his legs.

Drusilla took out the brandy glasses.

'My, my!' said Bobby. 'You must be anxious to get on my right side. The last drop of fine old French for Bobby! A nice warm glass, please.' Drusilla put the glasses in front of the gas fire, while Palfrey leaned against the mantelpiece and eyed the Foreign Office man.

His Excellency Señor Fernandez y Dias,' said Bobby, with great dignity, 'is certainly up to No Good. Another secret mission, and not concerned with Whitehall. That's offended the big wallahs. I might say annoyed. Dias comes with diplomatic privilege and does very much what he likes. He claims the sanctuary of the Embassy on his comings and goings, but he hasn't once made a formal visit to the F.O., so—secret mission.'

'Any idea about what?' asked Palfrey.

'The pluck of the Palfreys,' murmured Bobby, and raised his glass. When he had sipped, he said: 'I had one or two tentacles put out today. There was a party of sorts at the *Lanchester* thrown by Dias. Much wine flowed, much work was thrown upon the digestive organs; ostensible purpose of the gathering: the discussion of new railway projects in South America. Also, new ships for ditto. Present were Dias, his private secretary whose name is Lozana— sleek, dark, scented, forty, an obscure official at the Embassy, and —' Bobby paused, as if to marshal his thoughts, actually to increase their interest. Neither of them gratified him by asking him to hurry. 'Anderson,' he said, 'and William K. Bane.'

"Which Anderson?' asked Palfrey.

'Ours. Mr. Joshua.' Bobby looked peeved. 'Why don't you open your mouths and gape with the surprise which you should feel at the sensation?'

'No sensation,' said Palfrey; 'something of the kind isn't altogether unexpected.'

Joshua Anderson was a power in financial circles in Great Britain. He was one of the old school of financiers and his spiritual home was undoubtedly Wall Street. His speculations were vast and his gambles greatly daring, but he had never been on the wrong side of the law, and he had made fortunes for those people who followed his judgement or his luck. One day, said the Jeremiahs, Josh would come a cropper. When he did, tens of thousands of small English 'capitalists' would lose their all, and Josh would probably

spend the rest of his life in prison. He was a man of sixty, a small, wiry, berry-faced man with a caustic sense of humour. He was affectionately known as ‘our Josh’ by most of his friends. He did not live in state; he seemed interested only in money, and he had never tried to buy a title, which was so frequently the end and object of his kind. Only in that was he like Lumsden.

William K. Bane was a younger man, in the early fifties, an American from the Middle West. He had stormed Wall Street in the middle twenties, and won for himself a reputation second to none. He was, according to the many stories which circulated about him, a kindly man. His staff hero-worshipped him. He was benevolence itself. The responsibility for the many big crashes on Wall Street was not his; he had tried to prevent them. He appeared on the American scene as a big, rough, genial man, a New World Croesus, and the word ‘sinister’ seemed remote from him. Yet there were rumours of the kind which often damn a man. They did not damn Bane, but they made many people suspect his good intentions. He had first come into the limelight in Great Britain as a public figure for condemning the original Roosevelt Lease-Lend plans. He became one of the strongest of the pre-war Isolationists, and yet when the United States entered the war he put his millions and his influence on the side of the Administration. Contradictory, even-tempered, good- humoured, he wielded much power. One of his strongest platforms was the unity of the Americas. He opposed the antagonism towards Castilia when Castilia was probably the most unpopular country in the New World. He strove for good neighbourliness, he said, and he wanted to see America, not just the United States of America, so strong and powerful that it could defy all possible attacks from the outside world.

There was one other thing which Bane and Anderson had in common. It amounted to a phobia, and had earned both of them rebukes from high authority. They were anti-Soviet. On that their public reputations were mainly based. The public would have heard of them only seldom, and quickly forgotten them, but for their anti-Russian tirades.

Bobby finished his brandy and looked at his watch.

‘I ought to go,’ he said. ‘Not unexpected, you say?’

‘If Dias has planned an expedition it has to be financed,’ said Palfrey, ‘and Bane and Anderson do finance things.’

‘That isn’t what you meant,’ said Bobby.

‘Now, come,’ said Palfrey. ‘Isn’t Dias anti-Russian? Isn’t that a likely meeting-place for them, a mutual ground on which they can plan their actions?’

‘Shortage of radium won’t hurt Russia particularly,’ said Bobby, and then pulled a face at Palfrey’s expression. ‘Now what have I said?’

‘Of course it will hurt Russia particularly,’ said Palfrey. He felt suddenly more hopeful about Stefan. ‘Of the Big Three, only Russia has great numbers of people suffering from years of privation—privation of a genuine kind. Russia will be hit badly by a world shortage of radium. That,’ he added, almost dreamily, ‘is my one reason for hoping that Andromovitch will be

released to help us.'

'The big fellow?' asked Bobby. 'I've met him, haven't I? Well, perhaps you're right. Mine not to give opinions, mine but to state the facts. As I have. Tell a soul and I shall leave you both out of my will.' He heaved himself out of his chair. 'Sorry about the empty decanter,' he said, and took his leave.

Palfrey saw him to the street door. There was no shadowy figure outside, nothing to indicate that he had been followed. He had said a great deal of great interest, and had given Palfrey much to think about, but in spite of that Palfrey was chiefly concerned with Charles Lumsden's disappearance.

He decided to wait until midnight, and then telephone the Old Man again.

Charles Lumsden was not aware of being followed when he left Palfrey's flat. He was smiling to himself, amused in a bitter sort of way. It was like the Old Man to work something on these lines. There was no real love lost between them, and he knew that he was regarded as the prodigal son. He felt a sense of injustice.

Was this new affair of Palfrey's really a show for him?

He half wished that he had not given his undertaking. He was playing into the Old Man's hands. Life in London was not too bad; in fact there was much to be said for it. London still had its night-life.

'The truth is,' said Charles to himself, 'I don't know what I *do* want.'

By then he was walking along King's Road, mildly irritated because there was not a taxi in sight. He was an ass, he should have kept his taxi waiting. Buses bored him. They stopped too often, and conductresses were always pert and conductors usually insolent.

There were people walking behind him, but he did not really notice them until he came to a corner and found a man on either side of him. They jostled him, and he drew back.

'Excuse me,' said one of them, 'could you oblige me with a light?'

That was a time-honoured danger-signal, but it was a new one on Charles. In his experience, when people asked for a light they usually wanted something else. Sometimes it was an opening to tell a plaintive begging story. He was prepared to give them a light, but nothing more, and put his hand in his pocket. As he did so he was seized by both arms and something was thrown over his head, a thick cloth, which almost suffocated him. He tried to struggle, but was lifted clean off his feet. He felt frightened and foolish. Something struck his head and darkness engulfed him …

The cord which tied the bag was loosened, and the bag withdrawn from his head.

At first the light was so bright that it hurt his eyes. He closed them involuntarily, and kept them closed until they felt easier. Then he opened them and looked about him – and jumped in alarm!

*The three men wore black masks.*

The masks were hideous. They covered the faces, leaving gaps only for

the eyes and the mouth. They were hard-looking and shiny, and would have filled most people with alarm, for in their hideousness there was something both sinister and menacing.

The man facing him sat at a small desk. The others were on either side of him, standing a foot in front, obviously to make sure that he saw all three masks. These men were much of a height, about the same height as he was, but the man at the desk seemed taller and thinner.

'Mr. Lumsden,' said the man at the desk, I am going to ask you several questions, and on your answers will depend your life. Make no mistake about that.'

Charles stared at him without speaking.

He was feeling really angry now, more angry than frightened, although the last words had a chilling effect on him. He wished he could see what the man really looked like. He was dark-haired, the light reflected from the black, shining top of his head, but Charles could see nothing of his face. He was well dressed, and he had not attempted to cover his hands.

'Do you understand?' he demanded.

After a pause, Charles said: 'Yes.'

'That is better,' said the man at the desk. 'Now, Lumsden, don't waste time, answer me at once. Why did you go to see Palfrey?'

'I had an appointment with him.'

'What about?'

'I didn't know until I saw him.'

'Who made the appointment?'

'My father made it for me.'

'You are a dutiful son,' sneered the man at the desk, and Charles flushed. 'Is your father financing Palfrey in some wild scheme?'

Charles looked genuinely startled. 'Not so far as I know.'

'You have been warned to tell the truth,' said his questioner.

'You don't want me to guess the answers, do you?' snapped Charles.

'No, Lumsden, we want the truth. Think carefully. Has Palfrey persuaded your father to finance a project?'

'Not so far as I know,' repeated Charles, and licked his lips. 'The Old Man doesn't finance wild-cat schemes, he's too careful with his money.' He said that with great feeling.

'I see,' said the man at the desk. 'What did Palfrey say to you?'

'Not much,' said Charles.

He saw the other's hands clench.

'I warned you, Lumsden. You were with Palfrey for an hour. He must have said a great deal in that time.'

'Don't be an ass,' said Charles, surprising himself with his daring. 'I can talk nonsense for a whole evening. Palfrey asked a lot of questions, where I'd been, what I'd been doing lately, and rather hinted that he thought I might like a spot of fun. That's all.'

He hoped it sounded convincing.

Then one of the men by his side turned quickly and, without warning,

kicked him viciously on the shins. The pain was intense; Charles gasped and staggered into the other man, who struck him across the face and sent him reeling back again. Fear rose up in him like a raging sea, and he felt sick with it and with pain.

# Chapter Six

## Ordeal for Charles Lumsden

The pain receded, but the fear did not.

The man at the desk said: 'I don't believe you, Lumsden, and I will give you one more chance. Palfrey wanted you to join him in an expedition. Where is it to?'

'He didn't say anything about an expedition,' said Lumsden, in a quavering voice. 'It's no use pretending that he did, he didn't; I—no! No!' he screamed, for the men closed on him from either side.

They gave him no rest.

The ordeal lasted for no more than five minutes, but to Charles it seemed like hours. He hardly knew where they hit him, whether it was with their fists or with weapons; he felt pain in his arms, in his head, in his legs, his chest, his stomach.

At last it stopped.

He was not standing when they had finished, but was on his knees in front of the desk, clutching it, looking up into that hideous, blank black mask, sobbing, hardly aware of any particular pain. There was pain everywhere about his body, he was parched, he felt his tongue swollen against his teeth, he could not get to his feet when he tried. He did not know what he looked like; he could feel that his hair had fallen over his eyes, but could not find the strength to brush it aside. The only sound in the room was that of his heavy breathing.

His questioner said, quite calmly:

'Where did Palfrey ask you to go, Lumsden?'

Charles clenched his hands, tried to get up, sank down on his knees again.

'Tell me,' said the man at the desk, and the voice was soft and yet menacing. 'You will *really* get hurt if you lie to me again.'

Charles said, 'He didn't—he didn't—he didn't mention *any* place!'

He expected the men to attack him again, but they did not. He could not see them now, except when he turned his head. The pause which followed gave him a little more confidence. With a great effort he got to his feet and rested his hands on the desk, supporting himself with his wrists. He was near enough to the black mask to snatch it off –

'To snatch it off, to snatch it off!' The words were like a refrain in his mind. If he stretched out his hand he could snatch it off, snatch it off.

'I will give you one more chance,' repeated the man. 'Palfrey put a proposition to you. He told you where he was thinking of going. Tell me about it.'

'There—there isn't anything to tell!' cried Charles.

They set upon him again …

He was a helpless, hopeless wreck when they had finished, but he was no

longer afraid: it was impossible to be afraid because he could not feel more pain than he already did. There was only one emotion in his mind – anger. Blazing anger against them, hatred which was a little short of madness. He was on his knees again, with his head bowed, he was clenching his teeth to prevent himself from crying out. There were tears in his eyes: he could hardly see out of them, but he kept them open and kept looking at that mask. If only he could tear it off!

'Now come along, Lumsden,' said the man.

Lumsden said nothing. He doubted whether he could have uttered words even had he tried. He made no attempt to get up. He did not look up. He expected another onslaught, but it did not seem to matter greatly.

'Lumsden,' said the man again.

Lumsden stayed with his head bowed.

He heard movement, and shrank away. He felt hands at his arms, but this time they held him firmly and did not belabour him. He was led out of the room. The bright light of the passage hurt his eyes. He opened them only because he thought the men were going to take him downstairs, but they took him along a passage and into another room. There the light was subdued. That was all he noticed at first. They put him into a chair, and he sat there, helpless but at ease – or as much as his bruised body would allow. He did not move. He did not notice the men leave him.

Afterwards he considered it the most remarkable incident of this incredible adventure.

The door opened.

It was some time after he had been brought in here, for he was able to lift his head, and through a mist of tears and through the strands of hair in his eyes he saw a girl. She was young. There was nothing remarkable about her looks; she was just a pleasant-looking fair-haired young girl of twenty or so, in a plain grey dress which became her. There was sadness in her eyes as she approached him, and she said: 'I am so very sorry.'

'Please,' said Lumsden, in a croaking voice. 'Don't say that, please.'

'I know what you are feeling,' she said.

She sounded so sad, and the expression in her eyes seemed to indicate what she really felt. She moved behind him. He heard the sound of a tap turned on, and running water, and the clink of a tin or something hard against a bowl.

'Come along,' she said, unexpectedly.

She was by his side, helping him up. He did not think he would have tried to stand for anyone but her. He made an effort, and she steadied him. He had to lean against her, and she was surprisingly sturdy. She led him to a hand-basin, filled with water. There were bandages on a table by it, lint, adhesive plaster, other oddments of first aid and a large sponge. She pulled up an upright chair and made him sit down. Then she draped a towel about his shoulders, tucked it inside his coat collar, and began to sponge his face, after brushing the hair back with gentle fingers. The sponge was impregnated with an antiseptic, and it stung, yet it had a soothing effect

almost at once, and he did not resent it.

She squeezed the sponge into the bowl, and he was surprised to see it coloured red. Blood, of course.

She sponged him again, using a little more pressure, then told him to sit still while she dried his face with a hand-towel of some soft, fluffy material. It was soothing and refreshing. Then she took a comb and combed his hair back; that was soothing, too.

'I *must* look a mess!' he muttered.

'I have seen worse,' she said.

That did not strike him as odd at first, but a little later he realised what it implied. For the moment he raised his head and looked into the splash-back mirror.

He *did* look a mess.

Both his eyes were swollen, and there was a cut over one of them, still bleeding a little but not enough to worry about. There was another cut on his right cheek, which was also puffy, red and blue. There were scratches on his neck and his forehead, and there was a cut on his lip; that was bleeding more than any of the others. The girl came forward and dabbed it gently with a small sponge. He looked up at her, trying to smile.

'You're very good,' he said.

'I—I want to help,' she said, 'but there is so little I can do.' There was another emotion besides sadness in her eyes now; a hint of fear. She looked over her shoulder. The she tiptoed to the door and stood listening with her ear pressed close to the keyhole, which was placed high so that she only had to stoop slightly. She came back, slowly, soft-footed.

'I thought I heard someone,' she said. 'They won't let me lock the door.'

'I don't understand you,' said Lumsden.

'Please!' she said. 'Don't talk so loudly; you can never be sure who is in the next room.' Yes, the fear was there as well as sadness.

'I think we can put some plaster on now,' she said, and with her cool, deft fingers she patched him up.

'What did you mean when you said you'd seen worse?' he asked. He whispered, keenly aware of her warning.

'It has happened to others,' she said.

'But why—why do *you* stay?'

'I can't help myself,' she said. There seemed tragedy in the helpless shrug of her shoulders and the hopeless tone of her voice. 'I have to do as I am told. I am a qualified nurse, and useful to them.'

'Who are they?' he asked.

'I am not going to tell you,' she said. 'It would only lead to more trouble, and if they found out that I'd told you—well, I don't know what would happen.' Her smile was tremulous.

For the first time he studied her closely. She was certainly not good-looking, and 'pretty' didn't describe her, but there was a touching softness about her face. Her complexion was good, although rather pale, and her eyes were violet in colour. Her mouth was small but full, her nose was also

rather small.

'Don't try to press me,' she said, 'I can't tell you anything. But—I know they want to learn something from you.'

'But I've nothing to tell them!' he cried.

'Hush! They might hear you!'

'I'm sorry,' he muttered. 'I can't make myself realise that we're in their house.' 'Their' house – 'they' – why wouldn't she tell him more about them? How was it possible for them to frighten her and make her do whatever they wished?

'Why did they let you patch me up?' he asked, suddenly. It had seemed strange before, but he had not thought of asking her. 'It seems crazy.'

'Nothing they do is crazy,' said the girl.

'Well, *this* is.'

'It isn't,' she insisted. 'They'll keep you here for tonight, perhaps, or else they might take you to her if they think you're feeling reasonably well.'

'To her?' he asked, dazedly.

'Yes. She—' The girl paused, looked over her shoulder again, and, after a moment of tense silence, went on in a voice so low that he could hardly hear her. 'She is very lovely, she will be very friendly and—and kind. You see, they know that they can't make you talk by hurting you, they'll try the other way now. It's happened before.'

'It's the most fantastic business I've ever heard of!' declared Charles.

'I suppose it is,' she said. 'If things that do happen can be called fantastic. I shouldn't warn you, but—if she asks questions don't answer her. If you've managed to keep something back, don't tell her—on no account tell her—because she will immediately go to them and repeat what you have said. They're not interested in you, but only in what you can tell them.'

'I can't tell them a thing,' he said.

He felt a little mean saying that to her. He would probably have told her all that Palfrey had told him but for her fear that they might be overheard. That would be disastrous. He had come through so much, he was warned about the next attempt they would make, he mustn't take a false step now. But he was greatly tempted to confide in her. She made it so clear that she knew at what cost he had kept so silent.

She smiled, gently.

'You're quite right not to tell me,' she said softly. 'You mustn't tell anyone, *especially* her. You've been so brave.'

'But I know nothing,' he muttered. It was like a refrain in his mind, like the absurd fancy at one time that he could snatch off the mask of the man at the desk. It had become an automatic response – he knew nothing, he must tell no one, not even this girl, because they might be overheard.

'That's right,' she said warmly. 'Make yourself say that, don't admit anything at all.'

He said: 'You don't seem to believe me.' It sounded weak, his voice was querulous, and he felt anxious to talk about something else – about her. 'Why do you stay? They can't force you against your will.'

‘They can,’ she said. ‘My mother—’

She broke off, and there were tears in her eyes. At great discomfort, he leaned forward and gripped her hand. She forced the tears back. She raised her head, and took her hand away.

‘I prefer not to talk about it,’ she said. ‘I can do a little, as I am doing for you.’

‘It’s incredible!’ said Charles. ‘I can’t believe there have been others.’

‘There have!’ For the first time her voice was sharp. ‘Don’t underestimate them, that would be foolish. They know all the beastly tricks, they’ve had plenty of practice. I—’ She broke off again, and the fear came back. ‘Hush!’ she enjoined.

At first he could hear nothing; and then he heard faint sounds of movement. He thought at first they were in the passage, then he realised that they were in the next room. There were voices, but he could not distinguish what was said. He thought a man and a woman were in there.

The girl’s face hardened. She stood up quickly and pushed the chair further away, stepped to the wash-basin and began to collect the first-aid equipment. In a low voice, she said: ‘Don’t let them think I’ve said anything.’

He was not able to speak to her again, for the door opened and a man came in. It was a shock that he was not wearing a black mask. He was dark-skinned, good-looking and well dressed. He was also tall and thin, and Charles thought at first that he was the man who had questioned him, but this voice was entirely different, deeper, slower, that of an educated Englishman, without a trace of accent.

‘How is he, Muriel?’ he asked.

‘I have seen worse,’ she said, quietly.

‘Nothing seriously wrong with him?’

‘No.’

The man approached Charles and stood looking down, with a supercilious smile on his lips. He stood there for some minutes, while Charles peered up, more than ever conscious of his swollen eyes. It was becoming difficult to see out of one of them.

‘It’s a good thing for you that you convinced them that you knew nothing,’ he said, ‘or you would have been in a bad way, Lumsden.’

‘Someone else is going to be in a bad way before I’ve finished,’ said Lumsden, speaking with difficulty.

‘Threats?’ murmured the other. ‘They won’t serve you. I shouldn’t harbour thoughts of vengeance, if I were you. In fact you’ve little cause for complaint, and you’ll have less soon. Take my advice, and don’t go shouting about this to the police, or you will get hurt.’

Charles said nothing.

‘And take another piece of advice from me,’ said the man. ‘Have nothing to do with Palfrey. He’s the cause of all this. He isn’t what he seems.’ He turned abruptly. ‘Come along, Muriel.’

They went out.

Left alone, Charles examined his surroundings for the first time. He was

in a large room, a bedroom with a double bed. There were two doors; he had not noticed the second one before. It led to the room where he had first heard movement. Someone was still moving about in there – someone was singing – *singing!* It was a woman who sounded incongruously light-hearted. He listened intently at first. The singing stopped after a while, and then, without warning, the second door opened.

Charles had a vision of a girl, not much older than Muriel, dressed in a robe of some clinging material, dark, breath-takingly lovely. She was smiling at him.

''Alio,' she said, and held out her hands.

Charles was too much on edge to find it funny.

Four men were sitting in the room where Charles had been 'questioned'. None of them wore a mask. The masks were on the desk, fitting into one another, and the top one still looked hideous. The men were smoking and drinking, and seemed at peace with the world. They sat in relaxed silence, but all of them looked up expectantly when footsteps were heard outside. One of them was the Englishman with the cultured voice, the others were the men who had been there with Charles.

The door opened, and Muriel came in. She was in a different dress, she looked charming, and she was smiling demurely.

'Well?' said the Englishman, as she closed the door.

'I don't think he knows anything,' she said. 'I led him on pretty well; he fell for the line.' She laughed. 'If he'd known anything I think he would have told me. I warned him about Manita, of course, she won't get anything—but there isn't anything to get.'

'I can't understand why Palfrey saw him,' said the Englishman.

'Probably Palfrey thought he wasn't tough enough,' said Muriel. 'He isn't. If he'd known anything I doubt whether he would have taken the second beating.' She stepped to the desk and took a cigarette from a box, tapped it on her nail, and lit it. 'You'll have to do better than that for Palfrey,' she said. 'What are you going to do with Lumsden?'

'He doesn't know where he is,' said the Englishman. 'We'll take him away and turn him loose.'

Muriel took her cigarette from her lips, and said in a honeyed voice: '*Is* that wise? He's seen you, remember.'

The Englishman laughed. 'And he's seen you.'

'I don't exactly *want* to spend a few years in prison,' said Muriel.

'It would have been better to have thought of releasing him before you let him see you,' said the man with the sing-song voice. 'Oh yes, much wiser, very much.' He took his hand out of his pocket; in it was a small automatic. 'Now *this* will be.'

'We'll take him out and turn him loose,' said the Englishman, sharply. 'Let's have no argument.'

In spite of that, there was argument. It grew heated, voices were raised; only the Englishman and Muriel, who both favoured Charles's release, kept

cool during the next half-hour.

In the middle of the quarrel there was a tap at the door. Another man appeared, bowed and murmured something in Spanish. To English ears the words included sounds something like '*Excellency—Hortelan—Dias.*'

'We'll let Dias decide,' said Muriel, '*he* won't allow any argument. And if I were you I wouldn't keep him waiting.'

# Chapter Seven

## News from Moscow

Drusilla woke Palfrey just after nine o'clock. She was dressed and bright-eyed; obviously she had slept well. There was a tea-tray on the bedside table. From the kitchen came the sound of the Welsh maid, singing in a soft, happy voice There were the usual sounds from the street and from the river, and Palfrey drank his tea and listened to them.

She did not try to cheer him up by saying that Charles might turn up alive, for neither of them expected it. Yet when, after breakfast – it was nearly half past ten – the telephone rang, Palfrey was across the room like a shot.

'Is that Dr. Palfrey?' asked an impersonal voice.

Palfrey said, 'Yes.'

'Hold on, please, Chief Inspector Rowse would like to speak to you.'

'Who is it?' asked Drusilla urgently.

'The Yard,' said Palfrey. His heart was beating uncomfortably fast, and he steeled himself for the reception of bad news. The delay was considerable, and when Rowse came on the line he was apologetic.

'Sorry to keep you holding on, Doctor, I was called away, I've some news for you. We've found Charles Lumsden.'

'Safe?' Palfrey's voice rose.

'Badly knocked about, but alive,' said Rowse. 'He was in the river near Putney. As a matter of fact it's a miracle that he's alive at all. They meant to drown him, but a man on beat duty on the bridge heard the splash and investigated. He saw a bundle in the river, and— well, they got him out between them.'

Palfrey said, in a voice unsteady with relief: 'You're a bit mixed on the "theys".'

Rowse chuckled. 'I'm sorry. The first "they"— two or three men in a car which we haven't yet traced and who will probably never be found drew up on the middle of the bridge and dumped your friend over. Sorry to be so callous, but that's exactly what-happened. The policeman went in after him, after blowing his whistle for help—the second "they" were the people who gave him that help.'

'Is Lumsden conscious?' asked Palfrey.

'He's asleep in a Putney nursing home,' said Rowse, 'but as far as I can gather he shouldn't be beyond recovery. Apparently he was beaten up.'

'Nice and casual acceptance of brutality by the police,' murmured Palfrey. I ought to say: get the first "they". I won't because I know you will if it's possible. It is of vital importance.'

'We won't let the grass grow under our feet,' Rowse assured him. 'The nursing home is in Lower Richmond Road—*Riverside.* Quite a small place, I

believe. We've a man there to take his statement as soon as he comes round.'

'There will soon be two men,' said Palfrey. 'Very many thanks, Chief Inspector!'

Charles was awake when they got to the nursing home. Quick as they were, Old Lumsden had got there ahead of them. Charles had made some kind of statement to the police, and satisfied them, and he told the same story to his father. When, after what seemed an age, Palfrey was alone with him in the small, pleasant room, he said: 'They don't know half of it yet.' His voice quivered with suppressed excitement.

Before they left, Lumsden put an envelope in his hand. Palfrey murmured his thanks but felt a little disquieted. It was probably the 'financial backing,' and he would have preferred that to be arranged through Brett.

He did not open the envelope until they were back at the fiat.

It was a letter of credit limited to £50,000.

Last-minute difficulties with supplies brought disappointment. It was decided, after all, to leave for Paris on the following Monday. On the Saturday word came through that de Morency was available, and waiting with Bruton and Erikson in France. There was still no news from Moscow, and the temporary burst of optimism which Palfrey had felt when talking to Bobby Fairweather had subsided. There would be a serious weakening of their combined strength if Stefan were not with them, yet it was not reasonable to expect him.

In the middle of the preparations a telephone call from Christian brought the news that the Marquis had been called out of London on urgent Government business, so urgent that he had no chance of saying good-bye. He had wished them godspeed, said Christian, and would be eagerly awaiting news. There was one message of very special importance: the Marquis wanted Palfrey and the others to understand that the code used in the past on official business could be used for messages.

'Thank you, Christian,' said Palfrey; 'we'll see you when we get back.'

'My very best wishes, sir,' said Christian. 'Good-bye, sir.'

Palfrey replaced the receiver.

'Darling,' said Drusilla, 'you've got that bewildered look in your eyes.'

'I am bewildered,' admitted Palfrey. 'Brett suddenly called away. Official code for an unofficial jaunt. Hum!'

Drusilla said slowly: 'Does it mean that he expects us to run into serious trouble?'

'Darling,' said Palfrey, 'you've got that "I-never-ought-to-'ave started" look in your eyes!'

There was a further orgy of buying: cigarettes, tobacco, first-aid equipment, small tools – a cracksman's kit, said Palfrey, and meant it, for each of the men – maps large and small, and an assortment of weapons and ammunition. The permission to use the code *had* meant that Brett expected serious trouble.

Why had he not been wholly frank?

There was a warning from Bobby Fairweather. They should take plenty of provisions, for they could not rely on living on the country. Food conditions in Europe were terrible.

They had acquired, through Brett and the War Office, two jeeps, to carry all stores. The Mercedes-Benz was to be taken across the Channel with the jeeps; in Paris, Erikson and Bruton had a Packard which had been made specially for rough roads. Palfrey admitted a little ruefully that they seemed to be ready for a six months' tour through unexplored territory, but he felt more secure when he knew that all reasonable supply emergencies were anticipated and provided for. Petrol and oil would have to be taken from military depots on the Continent, and they were given special authority.

Nothing was discovered about the men who had thrown Charles into the Thames. No further attacks materialised. His Excellency called again, highly polished and highly apologetic, hoping that Palfrey was still in London, and ventured another appeal. Palfrey was sorry, really sorry, he said, but circumstances made it impossible. Dias was desolate, but not by a word or a gesture did he suggest that he suspected the real reason for the refusal. He said that he would not cease trying, he would come again and again until at last Dr. Palfrey had embarked on his journey to South America. Palfrey even began to doubt whether his suspicions were justified.

Then came a cable from Moscow to lift their spirits high. It read: *Paris, Tuesday – Stefan.*

That was the first time, said Drusilla, that Palfrey really looked himself. The news brought a brighter colour to his cheeks and his step became more jaunty. On Monday morning, at the airport – they were to fly; the car, jeeps and equipment would of course follow them by boat – he was, if anything, a little too confident. There had been another message from Brett, which made it clear that he had heard from Moscow, where the quest was warmly approved; there were no obstacles in their way except some which the Nazis had erected and which had been removed; and they could not guess what these might be.

'And opposition from Dias,' mused Palfrey. They were sitting in the transport 'plane, waiting for the take-off.

'There is one peculiar thing about Dias, if he's against us,' said Drusilla, who rarely spoke unless to the point. 'If Dias were in touch with the Nazis beforehand, surely they would have told him where the radium was hidden.'

'That's a point,' said Palfrey.

'So he should be able to get there first,' said Drusilla.

'Darling,' said Palfrey, softly, 'you are not at your best. If he thought he could safely get there first he wouldn't worry about stopping us. He'd go and collect. Oh, we start level, don't worry about that. I—'

He broke off in sheer amazement, for towards the aircraft, which was on the point of departure, came two men. *One of than was Dias.*

# Chapter Eight

## Gathering of Friends

With Dias was a slim, sleek man with fine brown eyes and curling eyelashes, a wide sensuous mouth and a pointed chin. His hair was black, pomaded, and brushed straight back from his high forehead. He was a Valentino of a man, a fitting foil for the vast South American, who was breathing heavily as he climbed into the cabin. His companion gave him support.

'Thank you, Lozana, thank you,' said Dias, in English.

'My dear *Doctor*!' he cried, and thrust forward his hands, took Palfrey's unwilling left hand and pumped it up and down, pressed and fondled it, talking all the time. 'How delightful to see you. What a remarkable—*most* remarkable—coincidence, and what a happy choice! We travel together!' He released Palfrey's hand and raised his own. Some passengers were amused by Dias's flamboyance, others were obviously annoyed. The steward came into the cabin, the last of the crew, and called out: 'Take your seats, please!'

'And—*and,*' cried Dias, high above the racing of the four great engines, 'and *this* is your wife? Señora, ever your most devoted, most humble, most admiring servant!'

'How are you?' murmured Drusilla.

'… your *seats,* please!' cried the steward.

Palfrey and Drusilla went to the Customs hut at Le Bourget where their luggage was examined with deceptive carelessness, marked, and released. They left the hut, and looked at the crowds about the busy airport, one of the busiest in Europe. There were some taxis, and private cars, and this was deceptive, for at the first glance it looked very much the same hustle and bustle and excitement as there had been before the war. But in the background there were dog-carts, pulled by cyclists, replacing taxis.

They were to be met, but did not see anyone they knew. Then from behind them a man spoke in a broad American accent, slurred Middle West.

'Howdy, strangers, I guess it's good to see you folks around here.'

They swung round. A short, wiry man was standing there and grinning at them. By his side was a taller man, as tall as Palfrey, loose-limbed, shaggy-looking, with straight fair hair and fair prominent eyebrows and an untidy moustache. He looked as if he had lived among corn and come to look like corn. He too was grinning broadly.

'Strangers?' said Palfrey. 'What strangers?'

Little was said, but there was an orgy of handshaking.

The small man was Bruton, the tall one Erikson, who came of Danish stock and looked as if he had reverted to the type of his forebears. Bruton often said that he was American as far back as his family could remember, and there was some truth in that. He came of Cornish stock, of one of the

earliest settler families. His eyes were dark blue and he always looked as if he needed a shave. Unlike Erikson's, his hair was crisp and curly. He was a good-looking man, and would have been remarkable had he been above instead of below middle height. Erikson looked magnificent.

'I'll take your grip,' said Erikson, and collected it. 'The automobile is parked over there.' He nodded towards a Packard, by which a man in a bright-blue suit was standing at ease, with an expectant smile on his broad face.

'Who's that?' asked Palfrey.

'Oh, that's Gus,' said Erikson. 'We use him when we're in Paris. Our watch-dog. We started to use him this time,' continued Erikson, still exaggerating his Middle-West accent, 'after we read about your airfield bother, Sap. I guess we preferred to make sure the Packard wasn't blown up.'

'A good thought,' said Palfrey.

In the room at the Hôtel Bristol which had been reserved for the Palfreys Bruton lit a cigar and Erikson filled his pipe.

No audience could have been more appreciative. Bruton sat on one of the twin beds, and Erikson lounged on a window-seat. Drusilla had a chair in front of the dressing-table, and toyed with a brush, while Palfrey squatted on the luggage rack. He took remarkably little time to tell a comprehensive story.

'Well, well!' said Bruton, when he had finished. 'That's one of your best for a long time, Sap. I'm looking forward to meeting Señor Dias!'

Erikson said: 'Did you have to have this man, Charles Lumsden?'

'As it worked out, yes,' said Palfrey. 'I think he'll be all right.'

'It seems to me that Charles Lumsden's earned his ticket,' said Bruton. 'He didn't have a nice time. When is your big luggage due?"

'Tomorrow.'

'And we start off tomorrow?'

'Not so fast,' said Palfrey. 'We want to find out what Dias is doing in Paris, and that may take a day or two.' His manner was one of studied casualness. 'We want to give Stefan time to settle down, too.'

'Raoul can get a line on Dias, maybe,' said Bruton.

'Have you seen Raoul?' asked Palfrey.

'Not yet,' said Bruton.

They did not have to wait long, for de Morency was at that moment downstairs.

He did not send up his name, but came straight up and tapped on the door. When Palfrey called 'Come in' he thrust the door open, and called: '*Déjeuner pour madame et messieurs!*' and strode inside.

There was devilment in the Frenchman; no one who saw him for the first time could long remain in doubt about that. It was in the gleam of his eyes and the smile on his lips, in the lean cut of his face, in the set of his shoulders. A mercurial man, a man who had no enemies except those whom he selected, for he was everyone's friend, and if there was devilment in him

there was nothing of the Devil. He was dark and immaculate, and seemed never to be still. He strode past Palfrey, his eyes dancing, went straight to Drusilla, put his hands on her shoulders and kissed her heartily on both cheeks: 'And for madame—my heart!'

Erikson kicked him, gently.

'All we require to make it perfect is Stefan,' said de Morency. He saw Palfrey's grin, and cried: *Is* he coming? But it *is* perfect! We must drink on that, and drink deep!'

Stefan Andromovitch was a remarkable man in more ways than one. The way which was noticed by everyone who saw him was the physical. He was a giant of a man, standing six feet seven, with vast shoulders, a man at whom people turned to stare in the streets, only to look away hastily, as if they were afraid of causing offence to the Colossus. Had they been able to look closely into his eyes, however, they would have known that there was no need to fear causing offence. Stefan had calm eyes, large, grey, slanting upwards slightly towards the temples – there was another hint of the Mongol in him, too, for his cheek-bones were high – and ever ready to smile. Yet they were often grave eyes. He had seen many horrors. He had been among those who had fought when the Nazi avalanche had descended upon Russia, had been in the defence of Moscow, and might have reached a high position in the Red Army but for his other qualifications – a quickness of mind and eye which had made the Kremlin experiment by sending him behind the German lines with an intelligence detachment.

So large a man was, in the opinion of many people, useless for secret intelligence work. No one really understood how Stefan overcame that disadvantage. The fact remained, however, that when the Marquis of Brett had first suggested the inter-Allied Intelligence Branch, known as Z.5, Stefan had been the Russian representative.

He had quickly won Palfrey's heart.

He had a serene temperament, ability far above the average, a quiet sense of humour and – of major importance – he did not expect English, French and American representatives to see all things in the same light as he did. He was not, he often admitted, a prominent Party man. He preferred people to parties, and the more varied the people the more he liked their company.

Drusilla and Palfrey were sitting up in bed, drinking coffee and eating the soft, delectable French rolls which had come back from their war-time hibernation, when a loud tap at the door made them jump. 'Hallo?' said Palfrey.

'Is a visitor permitted, *m'sieu*?' asked the chambermaid, meekly.

'Oh yes,' said Palfrey, expecting one of the others, and Drusilla pulled her bed-jacket round her shoulders. 'Come in.'

Stefan appeared, ducking in the doorway, his face one vast smile. Palfrey nearly upset his coffee. Stefan took Drusilla's face between his hands and kissed her roundly, gripped Palfrey's hand, engulfing it completely, and then stood at the foot of the beds, grinning from one to the other.

‘So it is all true,’ he declared, ‘you are both here—all the time I have been trying to convince myself that it was a poor joke, my friends.’

For once he talked a great deal, plied them with questions, told Drusilla there was no need for her to get up yet, breakfast could be sent up to the room for them all.

It was good to see him excited.

Drusilla went to bath. Stefan sat cross-legged on her bed and plied Palfrey with more questions, mostly about the expedition. Palfrey voiced his puzzlement about some of the aspects, and Stefan said crisply: ‘Of course you are puzzled, Sap. So am I. They would not bring us all together again for a private venture, the thought of that is absurd.’

‘Much thanks,’ murmured Palfrey. ‘The others think I have another bee in my bonnet.’

Stefan frowned. ‘A bee in your bonnet?’

Palfrey laughed. ‘Sorry! Old English slang. It means they think I’m crazy.’

‘Oh, I would not disagree with them there, but on this particular matter, no, you are not mad,’ Stefan said, cheerfully. ‘What I cannot understand is why *we* have not been fully informed. It would appear that nothing much is known, but they think we might make discoveries of some significance while we are after this man Dias.’

‘It started before anything was known about Dias,’ said Palfrey. ‘At least, before I knew anything about him.’

‘Perhaps it was already known that Dias was in search of the radium,’ said Stefan. ‘Well, my friend, I must bath, and Drusilla will want to dress. Afterwards we shall have breakfast in here, with Corny, Neil and Raoul—let me spring myself upon them without warning, they are probably not expecting me until later in the day.’

‘What a big little boy you are!’ said Palfrey. ‘Yes, I’ll tell them we are going into secret conclave over breakfast. Have you booked a room here?’

‘One was booked for me,’ said Stefan; ‘I was given all possible help in Moscow. That made me wonder whether I was going to help you on some small affair. I mean comparatively small,’ went on Stefan, hastily, ‘not a matter which would really justify all of us working.’ He stood up. ‘We need not talk about it too much, we know that we are looking for something else and we can be watchful. All right?’

‘Yes,’ said Palfrey.

‘Until breakfast, then,’ said Stefan. ‘And after breakfast, I hope that you will introduce me to Señor Dias.’

‘His Excellency Señor Fernandez y Dias,’ corrected Palfrey. ‘We’ll try to get an audience of some sort, or view him from afar.’

He laughed as Stefan went out, and was still smiling when Drusilla came back from the bath, glowing, radiant, bubbling over with excitement. Stefan had that effect on his friends.

Before the others arrived for breakfast Palfrey looked at the morning papers. *Le Temps* was on the top of the pile, and across the front page were streamer headlines:

Bastille Hospital Destroyed by Fire
MANY CASUALTIES AFTER LABORATORY EXPLOSION

Palfrey's spirits drooped, but he did not let himself dwell too much upon the loss, which would be so hard to replace.

# Chapter Nine

## The First Clue

Papa Giraud had been suspected by the French authorities for a long time, but no one had yet been found to give evidence against him. True, he had supplied the Germans with wines, but so had many other merchants who had worked for the Underground. Papa Giraud had worked for the Underground too – not very much, it was true, but during the worst of the terrors men of the liberation front had found refuge in his rambling cellars, which was certainly a point in his favour. He was so very old, also. One could not expect a great deal from him.

Yet rumours persisted.

There was talk of men who left his house by night and returned before dawn, men who were rarely seen except as shadowy figures, with the collars of their coats turned up and their hats pulled low over their eyes. They were *apaches,* perhaps, who worked for Papa Giraud.

Lozana did not go there himself. He sent Pedro, one of the men whom Charles Lumsden had seen.

That night a man left Papa Giraud's house, which was, in fact, a part of his warehouse, and hardly fit for human habitation, and slipped along the Rue de Casse. When he reached the end of the street and a ray of light from a wall-lamp shone upon him he was seen to be dressed in ragged clothes, his shoes were down at heel, he looked a typical resident of the district. Not far away he went into a *bistro* where there was much gaiety and wine, raw new wine for the most part, which few of the patrons really enjoyed. He was led to a room upstairs, and came out half an hour later, well dressed, swaggering, and carrying French identification papers. *Gendarmes* did not look at him twice. There was no such thing as a 'typical' German, the French knew that; a German could look like a Frenchman or an Englishman, although so few of them did. This one, who had sheltered for so long at Papa Giraud's, certainly looked like a Frenchman, and not the best kind of Frenchman at that. He was young, his suit was wasp-waisted, his coat-shoulders were padded. He went to the Bristol.

He was a stranger there, so far as the French staff knew, but when the hotel had been taken over by the German authorities he had been there frequently, and there was little he did not know about the hotel. He had been drinking alone for a few minutes when a man joined him – and Charles Lumsden would have recognised this man quite well. He was the Englishman with the cultured voice.

'They are all upstairs together,' said the Englishman, 'and the room is Number 57.'

The German nodded.

A little later he went upstairs. Only residents were allowed there, but who

was to know the face of every resident? Certainly not the floor staff, and certainly not the other guests. He walked slowly, as if he were there by right, until he drew near Room 57.

He could not hear what was being said inside the room, because of the double doors. He stood listening for a moment, and then looked up and down the passage. No one was in sight. He took a penknife from his pocket, but it was rather larger than most penknives, and it had several curious-looking blades. He opened one, thrust it into the lock, and twisted and turned swiftly.

The German opened the outer door of Room 57. There was just room for him to stand inside the space made by the two doors and to have elbow-room, so he closed the outer door and began to work with his knife again. Now he could hear a murmur of conversation and an occasional outburst of laughter. The fools had no idea that he was there.

There was a heavy weight in his coat pocket. The feel of it against his side was very satisfactory, for it was a hand-grenade. In a few minutes now he would fling open that door and throw the grenade, a very powerful one. None of those inside would have any chance to escape, no one was likely to live in that room.

He heard the second lock click back. He waited, on edge for the noise had seemed loud, but at the same moment someone had laughed, and it was doubtful whether the people inside the room had heard the sound at the door.

He turned the handle.

As he did so something touched the back of his neck. He jumped in alarm, and tried to turn round, but he could not. The something was a hand, and thumb and fingers were so large and long that they were able to encircle his neck. One moment he had been standing there with bated breath, the next the breath could not be drawn into his lungs, he seemed to be bursting, he had not even the strength to struggle.

The door opened, and Palfrey stood in front of him.

'Why, hallo,' he said, and grinned above the German's head at Stefan. 'Visitors?'

'One visitor,' said Stefan. He pushed the German forward and let him go. Breath and life came back, and the German, whose mind had been trained to think of nothing but the task he had been given, never to worry whether he might lose his life, thrust his hand towards his coat pocket. He took out the grenade – and a little man, Bruton, appeared from behind the door, held his wrist and, with the easiest movement imaginable, took the grenade away. The pin was still in.

'Dear me,' murmured Palfrey. 'How very unfriendly!' He glanced at the German, who stood against the wall, at bay, looking as if he would gladly fling himself at them. But there were five men as well as a woman, and the men were standing in a half-circle in front of him, all looking at him with great interest. All were smiling, as if they were amused by this wasp-waisted individual.

‘What can we do for you?’ asked Palfrey, who was the middle man of the five, standing immediately in front of the German. He spoke in French, but the man did not answer. He tried German, and although he got no answer he got a response, a start of surprise, making it obvious that the man had not been expecting to hear his native language.

‘You must talk, you know,’ said Palfrey, still in German, ‘because we’re all very interested in what you have to say.’ He gave the impression that this was a wonderful joke, and the German would gladly have smashed his lips against his teeth.

The men stood quite still in front of him.

The woman was sitting at the dressing-table, and he could just see her reflection. She was doing something to her nails, as if she did not want to see what the men were doing. The German tried to back closer to the wall, but could not. He was stiff with disappointment and perhaps with fear, and his eyes were moving in all directions, as if he were seeking a way of escape.

Then the huge man who had taken him unawares between the two doors stretched out a hand, gripped his throat again, and exerted that terrifying, suffocating pressure.

The woman got up abruptly and went out of the room.

The Rue de Casse was certainly not a showplace, but strangers there were not always molested. The huge man among the four who turned into the street about the time that de Morency entered the *Sûreté Nationale* would have discouraged any hopeful thief, in any case. The four men seemed in excellent spirits, and were doubtless feeling reckless.

They stopped outside Papa Giraud’s door. They knocked.

‘He told us so,’ said Palfrey, ‘and he told us also that you had given him the information against us, you had told him that we were worth killing. Why Papa Giraud?’

‘It is a lie—a great lie!’

‘Papa,’ said Palfrey, gently, ‘we do not wish to hurt you. But we will have the truth. Why did you send him?’

The tip of Papa Giraud’s tongue ran along his lips, he seemed to get more shrivelled as Palfrey looked at him – and he backed towards the stove. His hands were by his sides, and one of them he jerked backwards. He did not touch anything near the stove, for Bruton seized his wrist. There was a moment of tense silence, and then Giraud began to shiver violently. It was no fault of his, he was in terror of his life, they made him shelter them, they threatened him with such penalties if he refused. He had no wish to harm anyone, he was a helpless old man …

Palfrey was already well pleased with what had happened. Before he and the others had left the Rue de Casse, Papa Giraud had told them about the man who had come to visit him and had asked for the services of the young German. What was more, Papa Giraud had given him the man’s address. He was staying in a small hotel in a turning off the Rue de l’Opéra.

# Chapter Ten

## The Disappointment of Señor Dias

It was a great day for Inspector Dominade, and he made that clear to Palfrey. The infamous Giraud under lock and key at last, a nest of vipers smoked out and, by far the most important, he assured Palfrey, a Black Market warehouse unearthed. The Black Market was no better, it was giving rise to much trouble – perhaps Palfrey had seen the processions.

'Yes,' said Palfrey. 'Hunger-marchers don't usually march for fun.'

'No, my friend,' said Dominade. 'They march in fear, fear of the coming winter. The accursed Black Market – even coal and wood are affected, there will be great disasters in France if conditions remain as they are.'

'Coal means transport,' said Palfrey.

'*They* have transport,' said Dominade. 'There is nothing they do not have, these thrice-damned vultures who steal the people's food and sell at fabulous prices, who have influence in so many places and agents everywhere. But I weary you. Dr. Palfrey! Anything you want from me is at your command.'

Palfrey, who had called to bring a signed statement, declared that he wanted very little. He had really come to congratulate the inspector on the efficiency of his arrangements the night before, and to apologise if he himself had been a little irregular. He had so often worked when the police were against him that he sometimes forgot when they were on his side. That was a great joke, and they both laughed. Dominade heartily, Palfrey politely. There was, however, one other small thing. Palfrey had gone to see a man named Pedro at a small hotel near the Rue de l'Opéra. It was a curious thing, but he had seen this man in London, and had wondered what he was doing in Paris, because he had a bad reputation. Shortly afterwards Pedro had gone to the Hôtel Royale, in the Rue de Rivoli, and stayed for some time with a distinguished South American, Juan Lozana. Dominade's lips curled.

'Dias's man, yes.'

Palfrey looked astonished. 'Do you know him?'

'My friend,' said Dominade, leaning forward and lowering his voice, 'I worked in Paris during the occupation. I continued my work—and at some other work I worked overtime. Ha-ha! In my official capacity I sometimes assisted the Germans. So I sometimes knew when Señor Fernandez y Dias was in Paris on a special mission from South America. And I tell you, I met him and his man, Lozana, and I would not trust them—that much!' Dominade snapped his fingers loudly. 'That much!' he repeated, and snapped them again. 'But they have, you understand, the diplomatic privilege. There is little I can do.'

'That little may be enough,' said Palfrey. 'I want to go into the *Royale* and have freedom of movement. That goes for my friends as well. I would not

like to get into trouble with the management or with the police.'

Dominade's eyes creased at the corners.

'That is simple! The manager is a great friend of a friend of mine; it will be arranged—when?'

'At once?' murmured Palfrey, hopefully.

'At once!' cried Dominade, and snatched up the telephone. He talked in French with bewildering speed, replaced the telephone and picked up another, replaced that and waited, and before either of them spoke one of the telephone bells rang. Dominade listened, his eyes brightened and he plucked his beard. 'My friend, *all* my thanks!' he cried, and banged down the receiver. '*M'sieu le Docteur,* it is arranged. M'sieu de Morency will introduce you and your friends to the manager, that will then be secure for you.'

'I can't thank you enough,' said Palfrey.

'Nonsense!' declared Dominade, 'it is but a little, and too little. Ask more, now or at any other time.' He stood up and offered his hand. 'It has been a privilege to meet the great Dr. Palfrey.'

'You're very kind,' murmured Palfrey.

Outside, de Morency was waiting for him. De Morency had known that the manager of the *Royale* was a friend of a friend of Dominade's. It had all been arranged pleasantly, honour was satisfied, Dominade had been afforded an opportunity to express his thanks and also to condone unorthodoxy.

'You get ideas, Sap,' said de Morency, as they drove in a small car towards the *Royale.* 'I am glad that you have broken away from those dusty consulting-rooms.'

'Oh, they weren't dusty,' said Palfrey, absently.

He did not talk much on the journey, nor when he was taken into the hotel and, at the first opportunity, introduced to the manager, whose name he promptly forgot. De Morency was to introduce Erikson and Bruton a little later. Drusilla was at the *Bristol* for today, Palfrey said, there was certainly nothing she could usefully do. Stefan was with her. For such a job as he had in mind the big Russian would be too conspicuous.

He wanted, of course, to search Lozana's room at the *Royale.*

He had no lingering doubts about Dias and Lozana. Pedro's death that morning, in a car accident, would have convinced him, even if he had not already been reasonably certain that Dias and Lozana were in active opposition to him. He had not worried Pedro a great deal, but asked a few leading questions, feeling sure that Pedro would hurry to tell Lozana. The best had happened, for Pedro had gone in person, instead of telephoning. There was nothing remarkable in the fact that Lozana had straightway gone to the Embassy, but it was worth noting.

Lozana, he learned, was in his room, but had ordered a table for two. He had not said who his guest was to be, but had hinted that he would be a personage of some importance.

'Oh,' said Palfrey, and looked at the manager whose name he could not remember. 'Could that table be laid for three?'

‘But, *m’sieu,* it is ordered for two.’

‘Yes,’ said Palfrey. ‘Just a little mistake. Do you think you could arrange it?’

I will, since I am asked by such a good friend to help you,’ said the manager, ‘but it is a most unusual thing, and I would not do it for many people.’

‘Three,’ said Palfrey.

‘Three, *m’sieu.*’

Palfrey sauntered into the main lounge. It was divided by a passage connecting the front hall with the restaurant, and was like a Tower of Babel. Paris fashions remained varied and distinguished, and here too Paris looked remarkably normal. Palfrey hid himself behind a palm, smoked cigarettes and drank coffee, until he was joined by Erikson and Bruton, who came with de Morency. He did not think he was being watched by anyone that morning, and no one had shown any particular interest in any of them.

‘Now what, O Chief?’ asked Bruton, lazily.

‘You and Neil will have a shot at Lozana’s room when he’s at lunch,’ said Palfrey, ‘and Raoul will keep his eyes open and warn you if there is trouble in the offing. You know what we’re looking for. Addresses in Europe, particularly of Germans, anything that might help us.’

‘What are you going to do?’

Palfrey twisted some strands of hair about his forefinger.

‘I am going to tell Dias what we’re looking for,’ he said, and so surprised them that not one of them asked him whether he were mad – at first. Then all three declared that he was, but he persuaded them to change their minds, or at least suspend judgement.

He was alone when Dias arrived with much ceremony. Dias was accompanied by his two attendants, one of whom stood near one door, the second by the other door of the dining-room. He looked magnificent. Lozana was somewhat chastened, Palfrey thought, as he observed them from his point of vantage. He saw Dias look down at the table, and then stare at Lozana. Words passed. Dias pointed to the places laid – three stabs of his finger towards three places. Lozana shook his head. He looked about him, as if for a waiter to rectify the mistake, and then he saw Palfrey, who advanced smilingly towards him.

Dias also saw him, and immediately radiated good-humour. He took Palfrey’s hand in both of his.

‘What a happy chance, Dr. Palfrey! By mistake a third place was laid at my table’ – he did not say Lozana’s table – ‘and here, by remarkable coincidence, you are able to take it. I *beg* of you to find time to lunch with me. And with Señor Lozana. I wish only that your wife were here, but—but perhaps she *is,* Doctor?’

‘No,’ said Palfrey. ‘She has gone with my friends to Versailles. To see the gardens.’ He smiled as he sat down, and Dias beamed his satisfaction. Lozana looked wary, but Dias was always wary, no matter how he looked. ‘I invited myself,’ Palfrey added.

‘I beg your pardon,’ said Dias.

‘The third place,’ said Palfrey. ‘I suggested it.’

‘Then that is remarkably kind of you,’ said Dias. ‘You remembered my invitation, and to accept it in such a practical fashion—I am full of admiration, Doctor!’

‘Thanks,’ smiled Palfrey.

‘We shall have champagne!’ declared Dias.

‘The wine of the country,’ said Palfrey. ‘Why not? And we have much to celebrate, haven’t we?’

‘Such a meeting is worthy of celebration,’ agreed Dias.

‘I didn’t quite mean that,’ said Palfrey.

Dias sat back and looked at him. Lozana seemed on edge, and was sitting upright. The head waiter came and was obsequious, which showed how effectively Dias hypnotised such personages. Other waiters flowed towards them and placed plates in front of them, champagne glasses, the silvered bucket of ice containing a dusty bottle. All this was done while the three men sat in silence.

At last Dias said: ‘What did you *quite* mean, Dr. Palfrey?’

‘Our mission,’ said Palfrey, and speared a tiny sardine, a wafer of olive and a tiny square of potato covered with a white sauce.

‘Mission?’ echoed Dias, in a husky voice.

‘That’s right,’ said Palfrey. ‘The search for the radium.’

‘Ra-dium,’ sighed Dias.

‘Of course,’ said Palfrey, after eating with relish. ‘I wish you’d told me why you were so interested in me before. It’s no secret. Van Doorn came and told me that there is radium hidden in Germany, and I want to find it. That’s quite straightforward. Apparently you want it. Need we fight about it?’

‘*Fight?*’ breathed Dias.

‘After all,’ said Palfrey, ‘this isn’t England. And I am here and I’ve started. You didn’t kill Charles Lumsden and you didn’t kill me and my friends last evening. On the whole, you aren’t having a very good time, are you? As I say, *need* we fight?’

After a long, breathless pause, while Palfrey speared more delicacies from among his *hors-d’oeuvres,* Dias said: ‘Are you suggesting that we should work *together,* Doctor?’

Palfrey laughed; Lozana gasped; Dias stared fixedly at Palfrey, and gradually his cheeks and his jowl darkened, for he realised what he had done, he had *told* Palfrey what Palfrey wanted to know.

‘Not exactly,’ said Palfrey. ‘I’m suggesting that you should drop out, before you get hurt. But your plate, Excellency, it is nearly full. Eat up!’

# Chapter Eleven

## Palfrey is Ingenuous

It could not be said that Dias ate with gusto, but he did show some interest, in a contemplative fashion, in his food. Lozana, who at first had looked as if he were suffering from seasickness, suddenly attacked his food savagely. Plates came and went. Champagne ebbed and flowed. It had no noticeable effect on Dias's spirits, and Lozana might as well have been drinking Vichy water for all the exhilaration he showed. Only Palfrey seemed to benefit from the sparkling, bubbling champagne.

'You are talking absolute nonsense, Doctor,' declared Dias, much more himself. There was even a faint smile on his small red lips.

'Oh yes,' said Palfrey, 'and I'm the first to admit it. It's the champagne. But in my chitter-chatter there may be a grain or two of common sense. That's what you ought to pick out. You probably see the danger signals. Here is your time to retreat or else to declare further war.'

Dias did not speak, but he smiled more freely.

'No?' murmured Palfrey, sadly. 'That's a pity. But you know your own motives best. What's your price? Would half a million pounds interest you?'

Dias gaped.

'So it would,' said Palfrey. 'I wish I had half as much, it would be worth it. Still, I haven't. Messrs. Bane and Anderson might have, don't you think? Old Josh could even put it up himself.'

He glanced swiftly at Lozana, for Dias had steeled himself and was not likely to give away much information by his expression. Lozana, on the other hand, had been left out of the conversation for so long that he probably had less control over his face. He had. He looked dumbfounded.

'Well, well!' said Palfrey. 'Railways and ships run by radium!'

Dias half rose from his chair, and crashed his clenched fist on the table. A glass sprang into the air and fell, a plate was shaken from the table, knives and forks clattered to the floor. People stopped talking and turned to stare at him, and waiters came hurrying. Dias sank back in his chair, now looking unmoved. The outburst had done him good, he had been repressing his feelings far more than was good for him. Now he sat back while the mess was cleared up, watching Palfrey closely all the time.

A waiter brought ice cream.

'M'm, good,' said Palfrey. 'Well, what are we going to do?'

'I do not think that I have ever listened to so much nonsense in my life,' said Dias. 'I do not understand what you have been talking about. Apparently you are looking for some radium. I am not interested in radium. It has no effect on me.'

'But it might on the President's lady,' murmured Palfrey.

'You choose to joke about a matter of delicacy and importance,' said Dias.

‘I cannot prevent you. The English have appalling manners at all times, and I am not surprised at anything. I warn you, Dr. Palfrey, that I am not a man to be ridiculed. I am a person of some importance.’

‘That’s a matter of opinion,’ said Palfrey. ‘I don’t rate you very high. All right, it’s war. Up to now I have been purely on the defensive. From now on, attack!’ He pushed his chair back, stood up, and bowed. ‘Thank you, Excellency, for a most enjoyable lunch!’ He nodded to Lozana and sauntered off.

Lozana and Dias did not speak after he had gone, but got up and stalked out, followed by the two attendants. Palfrey watched them from the lounge. Bruton was by his side.

‘You’ve given them plenty to think about,’ said Bruton, cheerfully. ‘I like the look on Dias’s face. Full of the milk of human kindness!’ There was an air of repressed excitement about the little American. ‘How did it go?’ he asked.

‘Well, I hope,’ said Palfrey, ‘but Dias is deeper than he sometimes looks. What about you?’

Bruton winked.

‘Did you get something?’ Palfrey asked, with quickening interest. He had not thought it likely that the others would find anything of particular interest in Lozana’s room; the man was not likely to leave important papers there.

‘Dr. Palfrey,’ said Bruton, ‘I think we got enough to satisfy you. Names and addresses in a small book in a false bottom of Lozana’s suit-case—and what a suit-case!’ He turned and went on talking in undertones as they went towards the entrance. ‘We left the book there after copying the names and addresses. One was yours, Sap!’

‘Oh,’ said Palfrey, surprised.

‘One,’ said Bruton, ‘was Papa Giraud’s.’

‘One of us ought to be insulted,’ said Palfrey.

‘Another was of a M’sieu Garon, of the Rue de Lui,’ said Bruton, in high fettle, ‘and there were three others—one in Antwerp, one in Stockholm, and one in Berlin. The last name in the book,’ added Bruton, ‘is Colonel Baron van Kriess. They don’t call them colonels now, do they? *Au revoir* to Herr Obersts, just plain Herrs. Not bad, Sap?’

‘*Very* good,’ said Palfrey.

‘And extremely secret,’ said Bruton, ‘or the book wouldn’t have been tucked away so safely. There was another thing. We didn’t bring it; we thought it better that Lozana should not know we’d paid a visit.’

‘Rightly,’ said Palfrey. ‘What was it?’

‘A curious thing. Remember Charles Lumsden’s story of the black masks?’

‘Yes,’ said Palfrey. ‘But they would be too large to go in a concealed bottom of a suit-case.’

‘They were, but what I saw wasn’t,’ said Bruton. ‘Neil made a sketch of it, and he wasn’t far out in size. It’s a miniature mask, about the size of a shilling piece. A bauble to go on a watch-chain, maybe.’ Seeing Palfrey’s

thoughtful expression, he added: 'We could go back for it.'

'No,' said Palfrey. 'I've upset Dias and Lozana enough for one day. It is better to leave it. I ought to get to Rotterdam, the delay is worrying me,' said Palfrey. 'This started with van Doorn, and his friends or his family might know more about it. Stefan and 'Silla had better come with me, while you and the others follow by road, after a preliminary visit to 17 Rue de Lui.' He pulled at his hair.

'And some more,' said Bruton. 'We're to watch Dias and Lozana.'

'Well, you *could* slide that in,' said Palfrey, 'Garon, Garon, Garon,' he repeated. 'The name's familiar. I seem to know it well. Have you heard it before?'

'I've *seen* the name,' said Bruton.

'Where?'

'Over shops,' said Bruton, and he was suddenly intent. 'Giraud was in Black Market stuff, and *Garon et Cie* is a multiple firm of food stores, Sap. Can it be *that* Garon?'

'Where's the Rue de Lui?'

'I'll find out,' said Bruton, and went to the reception desk. He was there for some time, and came back with the information that M. Pierre Garon, of 17 Rue de Lui, *was* the owner of the chain of food stores, and that the Rue de Lui was a short thoroughfare off the Champs Elysées. The houses there were large; it was a street of the wealthy.

'We'll put Raoul on to this, for a start,' said Palfrey. 'Where is he?'

'Drinking bubbly, probably,' said Bruton.

De Morency was outside a café near the .hotel. Erikson, he said, had left in the wake of Dias. He wanted to know what Palfrey had done to make the South American look so much like death. Palfrey gave him a brief outline, and before de Morency could comment, added: 'But the others have done better with these names and addresses. What do you know about Pierre Garon, of the Rue de Lui?'

De Morency raised his eyebrows, wrinkled his nose, and struck an attitude.

'Stinking fish,' he said.

'How high does he stink?' asked Bruton.

'Very high,' said de Morency. 'I cannot make up my mind about him, Sap. He is tolerated, no more. He has genius for organisation, and yet—it would not surprise me if one day he is arrested and proved to be one of the worst collaborators. He is in great trouble now because his shops are often unable to supply rationed goods. It is suggested that he sells them on the Black Market. He has, of course, one of the biggest companies in Paris—in Western France, one could say. His shops are everywhere. Only two days ago I saw a mob break into one, and they did not leave much on the shelves—*or* many of the shelves,' he added, with a grimace.

'Dias knows him,' Palfrey said.

'I am not surprised,' said de Morency, 'but he also knows us.'

It was after dark when de Morency, Bruton and Erikson went to reconnoitre the house of M. Pierre Garon. A quarter of an hour after they had left, there was a telephone call for Palfrey.

It was de Morency, and he wasted no time.

'Bring Stefan here, quickly,' he said, and rang off without giving Palfrey a chance to ask questions.

'You stay here,' Palfrey said to Drusilla. 'Please!'

She watched him and Stefan hurry out.

It was only ten minutes' walk to the Rue de Lui. They were not more than half-way there before they were aware of excitement among the people passing them, people thronging the sidewalks and the roadway, and most of them going in one direction. Fire-engines were clanging on their way through the crowds, and by the time they were a few hundred yards from the Rue de Lui they could see the red glow of a fire not far off.

They reached the corner of the street.

*Gendarmes* were struggling to keep back the crowd, which was pouring into the roadway, preventing traffic from passing. Firemen were bellowing, bells were ringing, but the people seemed to have lost their heads and would not move aside. Some distance along the road they were roaring, a deep-throated angry roar.

Stefan said: 'Mob law, Sap.'

Palfrey said: 'Can you force a way through?'

'Yes,' said Stefan.

He thrust his way forward, striking out when people tried to get in his way. The fire further along the street was brighter now, and in the lurid red glare faces were clearly visible. People at the back of the crowd were taking up the roar. Stefan forged ahead, with Palfrey close by him, and the crowd closed behind them. The *gendarmes* were helpless now, and gave up the struggle.

They reached Number 17.

It was ablaze from the first floor up, and flames were beginning to shoot skywards. A stronger cordon of police had managed to keep the masses out of the grounds, but a few people had passed them and were flinging stones and bricks into the windows; glass was crashing, the roar of the mob was louder, almost drowning the sound of the flames.

De Morency came up.

'You're too late,' he said. His voice was harsh. 'I hoped you'd get here in time, Stefan.'

Palfrey snapped: 'Where are Corny and Neil?'

'Oh, *they* are all right,' said de Morency sombrely. 'We were all inside when the crowd first arrived—they broke down the front door and stormed in. We got Garon away from them and kept him for a while, but they got him back at last. They're quite mad. It was Garon or us,' he added, defensively. 'We did all we could.'

Palfrey said: 'Where is Garon?'

'You will see,' said de Morency.

Erikson and Bruton came up, and they too were morose, as well as disappointed and angry with themselves, for they believed they could have done more. For the time being they stood by, with people jostling them on all sides, watching the flames. One fire-engine had forced its way through, and the *gendarmes* were again laying about them to clear a path for the men, but nothing could save the house.

Palfrey said again: 'Where *is* Garon?'

'Up there,' said Bruton.

The heat was almost suffocating, smuts fluttered down on to their faces, and it was difficult to breathe. They moved back. Stefan worked with the police, shaming the others by his example. They forced the crowd back and the firemen came through – and as they started to rig the hoses the roof of the house crashed in. Flames shot hundreds of feet into the air, and there was a concerted roar of alarm. The people rushed back, unbidden now, but there was no immediate danger.

Then, in a window of the second floor, a man appeared.

He was visible against the fiery glow, a tall, bearded man – and his beard was on fire! He was screaming and gesticulating, snatching at his beard, trying to put out the flames. His hair caught fire, and went up in a blaze. They could hear his screams above the roar of the flames, for the crowd was hushed now, and stood watching with bated breath.

The man, in a frenzy of pain and torment, flung himself out of the window.

It was Garon. When he was picked up his neck was found to be broken.

# Chapter Twelve

## Charles Arrives

It proved that the ringleaders of the mob which had started the attack on Garon had deliberately set fire to the house. That was the point on which Palfrey tried to concentrate. Had they gone for Garon, dragged him from his house and hanged or knifed him, the obvious explanation would probably have been the right one. Garon was distrusted and hated – and Garon had been sacrified to appease the anger of the crowds.

Next day Palfrey learned more about Garon.

It was Dominade who told him most, a worried Dominade, in whose district the outrage had been committed. There was no *proof* that Garon had been a Black Market trader, but the people believed he was. He had been a consultant to the Government, and the people blamed him as well as the Ministers. The Paris Press was divided; some demanded the immediate resignation of the ministers concerned with food and its distribution, others upheld both the Government and Garon. It was impossible to say which was right; only one thing stood out crystal clear: the food situation had in it the seeds of disaster.

Palfrey sent a report to Brett, in code; that was the least he could do, although it was hardly a matter for an Intelligence Department.

He would not commit himself to an opinion about Dias's activities where Garon was concerned. The fact that the name had been in the book was not evidence enough to show that Dias and Garon were associates. It was even possible that Dias had marked Garon down – *for death,* thought Palfrey.

He told only Stefan of that, as they were sitting in the lounge of the *Bristol* on the following evening. Drusilla was upstairs, and they were waiting for her before having coffee. De Morency, Erikson and Bruton had gone to the theatre, for there had been no work on hand for the night. All trace of Dias had been lost. What particular play they had selected Palfrey did not know.

All three of the men had been morose all day, blaming themselves for the death of Garon. They were convinced that if they had acted more quickly they might have saved his life, and the terrified man would probably have told them the truth. De Morency had telephoned from the house for Stefan, believing that Stefan's strength might help them to save the man, but help had come too late.

It was better, Palfrey thought, to let them get the incident out of their systems in the way they thought best.

Stefan, who rarely smoked, rolled a cigarette between his fingers, and murmured: 'You think perhaps Dias inspired that mob?'

'He might have done,' said Palfrey. 'I was on the list, and he's tried to kill me. I know it's guesswork. I won't even say that I think it's likely, but it *is*

possible.'

'And leads us where?' asked Stefan.

'Nowhere. That's the devil of it.' Palfrey lit a cigarette and moodily watched the smoke. 'If all of us in the book were concerned with food or food distribution I would be inclined to say that we knew what Dias was really doing. But von Kriess isn't connected with food.'

'What about the others?' asked Stefan.

'One is Jacques Midaut, of Antwerp,' said Palfrey. 'A shipowner, and owner of some of the Antwerp docks. The other is Kurt Knudsen, a Stockholm fishing-fleet owner. I think we'd better wait for more developments. Before going to Rotterdam, you and I had better go to Antwerp. That'll be the only change in plans, so far—unless we get news of Dias.'

'I think you are wise,' said Stefan. 'Will you leave a message for Charles Lumsden?'

'Yes,' said Palfrey, and his eyes brightened; they aways brightened when he saw Drusilla.

She walked towards them slowly, dressed in the green suit, eyed surreptitiously by many men. Palfrey stood up and pushed a chair forward. A waiter came at once; waiters rarely kept Drusilla waiting for long.

They were drinking coffee, and Palfrey was looking towards the dining-room, now nearly empty, when a voice spoke from behind him.

'Hallo, Palfrey!'

Palfrey swung round.

'Charles!' said Drusilla, in surprise.

Stefan got up quickly, towering over Charles Lumsden.

The young Englishman was beaming, highly pleased with himself. He showed few traces of his London misadventure. Two small pieces of sticking plaster, one on his temple and the other on his cheek, and an eye which was slightly swollen, were all that remained.

His eyes widened when Palfrey introduced Stefan.

'I was afraid you'd move on without me,' he said, 'and decided to come ahead of time. I hope it's all right,' he added, rather anxiously.

# Chapter Thirteen

## More Evidence of Unrest

The aircraft touched down before midday. Palfrey's first impression was of efficiency and contentment. The airport officials and stewards were friendly, there was no noticeable shortage of taxis, the lunch at the restaurant was excellent. Aircraft were landing or taking off every few minutes; the atmosphere of hustle inseparable from a large aerodrome seemed more pronounced here. It had an exhilarating effect on Palfrey and Drusilla, but Charles had lost much of his ebullience. Stefan regarded everything and everyone with serene calm, and always had a reassuring influence on them all. It was very seldom that he showed any sign of losing his temper.

'This seems better,' Drusilla said.

'Much,' agreed Palfrey.

'We have not yet seen Antwerp,' said Stefan. 'But perhaps we are suffering from the gloom which followed our comparative failures—Paris was, perhaps, not so bad as we imagined.'

Charles snapped: 'Were there food riots, or weren't there?'

'I have seen many worse,' said Stefan. 'Are we going straight to an hotel, Sap?'

'I think so,' said Palfrey.

'I'd certainly like to,' said Drusilla.

Erikson had given them the name of a small hotel near the docks, which he said was central and extremely good. Their taxi-driver said at once that he knew it. He was a quiet man, and Palfrey looked at his eyes thoughtfully; they were the eyes of a man who was not thinking much about what he was saying.

Even when he saw Stefan his expression did not change.

Charles, ruefully apologetic now, squeezed in the back with Palfrey and Drusilla. The driver strapped on their luggage and went back to his seat, still in a curiously mechanical fashion. He started off at a slow pace, and they drove through some of the poorer streets. There was comparatively little bomb or shell damage to be seen, only here and there were there noticeable gaps in the buildings. Most of the houses were small and squalid-looking. Listless children stood about in the streets, very few of them playing. There were old women and old men sitting at windows, looking out, many of them with pipes in their mouths. Palfrey did not see one who was actually smoking; the pipes were empty.

Turning a corner, they came upon a large crowd of silent, indifferent people, pathetically reminiscent of the marchers they had seen in Paris, but these people were not marching. They were shuffling slowly towards a stationary van at the far end of a long street. Men, women and children were in the line, silent, except for the cries of children and the reproving voices of

the parents.

Palfrey leaned forward. ‘Slow down, please,’ he said.

The taxi-driver obeyed. They drove slowly past the van. People coming away from it were carrying basins, bowls or cups of steaming soup. Three flushed women behind a counter in the van were serving soup as quickly as they could. As the taxi drove past one spilled a little, and Palfrey saw the eyes of a dozen people turn towards the pool on the counter – hungry, reproachful eyes.

Charles leaned forward and whispered to Stefan:

‘Is *this* better?’

‘Now, my friend,’ said Stefan, chidingly.

They came out of that long, narrow road of mean houses into a broader throughfare, where trams were running and there were crowds of cyclists. Free-soup kitchens were up and down the road, and they were all besieged. There were few police about; it was as if the police knew that they would not be needed, the people were too docile.

Ahead of them, when they turned another corner, were the docks. Derricks and cranes stretched in all directions almost as far as the eye could see. The funnels of cargo ships alongside for unloading were like dark rectangular blots on the blue sky. The water of the docks seemed blue and smiling, but there were no smiles on the faces of the people.

Hundreds of men were standing about near the docks. Some gates were locked. Now they found the police in strength and there were also armed soldiers, all of them Belgian. There was a sullenness about the ‘docility,’ and Palfrey, watching the scowling people, sensed that they were hostile towards the taxi and its occupants. The driver tried to put on speed, but could not. Men in twos and threes were crossing the road in front of them, deliberately forcing them to slow down, but never going so far as to make them stop. When they were half-way along the dock-side road something smashed against the window nearest Drusilla. Instinctively she drew back. Mud was on the window, and began to slide sluggishly down, darkening the interior of the car. They had hardly recovered from the shock before there was another smack; the driver put on his brakes quickly, for the windscreen was covered with mud and he could not see in front of him.

‘I will hurry,’ he said, as he jumped out. ‘There has been a strike for many days.’

Lionel Mann, of *The Times,* was a thin, wiry, terse-speaking man. He had been in Antwerp for some months, and some of his articles on Black Market had not made nice reading. He knew Palfrey by reputation, and, over a whisky-and-soda, was morosely eager to talk. He did not like the ways things were developing down in Antwerp and, from what he could gather, in many other towns. What was it like in Paris?

Palfrey told him what he knew.

‘It’s pretty well the same here,’ said Mann. ‘Chief trouble, transport. But’ – he scowled ferociously – ‘the B.M. wolves find it. Plenty of it. *I* don’t know

who's to blame. My opinion of the Government is that it's sound. But I wouldn't say the same of all civil servants. This dock strike—who *can* blame the men? Midaut is behaving like a swine. He's got a good reputation, used to be all right, but now' – Mann swallowed his whisky and put his glass down with a bang. 'He seems to have lost his senses. There *is* work at the docks by night. Not only his—all over the place. Usually manhandled supplies. Sometimes with lorries and vans. Of course the men don't like it. They feel sure the food is going where it shouldn't.'

'Is it?'asked Palfrey.

'I wouldn't like to commit myself,' said Mann, 'but *something* odd is happening.'

'Do you know Midaut?' asked Palfrey.

'Yes. He used to see the Press whenever they asked for it; now he surrounds himself with a bodyguard and won't open his mouth. I'll tell you one thing, Palfrey: that man's frightened. And if he's behind Black Market he's got good reason for being frightened, because one day the crowds will really go wild. When I say they'll tear him limb from limb, I mean limb from limb and finger from finger. They've been good, these Belgians, but it mustn't go on much longer. What are *you* after Midaut for?'

Palfrey smiled. 'I'm looking for some radium.'

'Radium!' said Mann. 'Here, give me another drink.' He drank. 'Radium,' he said, witheringly. 'Don't try that one on me. I suppose you want an introduction to Midaut?'

'It would be helpful,' murmured Palfrey.

'Don't be so sure,' said Mann. 'It probably won't get you past his outer defences.' He scribbled a note, all the same, and Palfrey, deciding to waste no time, went immediately to the dock-owner's offices. He was assured that Midaut was not there. He went to his home, a flat in the best residential part of Antwerp, overlooking the Schelde and the grim Forte de la Flandre, with the swing-boats, skittle-alleys and fairground of the Kursaal near by.

Midaut, he was assured, was not there.

The next morning the Belgian newspapers were splashed with sensation; Jacques Midaut had committed suicide and had left a letter saying that the ships were being unloaded by night and the cargoes were going to the Black Market. He declared that he had been blackmailed into helping, that he could stand it no longer and intended to take the easy way out. Leading articles shrieked for action, the Government stepped in; by the end of the day negotiations with the strikers were over and the men were back at work.

There was new life in Antwerp, noticeable in the squared shoulders and the springy steps of the people, but it did not make any reduction in the number of pale, hungry faces, in the crowds which besieged the soup kitchens, or in the activities of the Black Market.

It was little more than half an hour's flight from Antwerp to Rotterdam. Palfrey and his party reached there on the day after the Antwerp strike had been settled. All three of them were quiet as they left the airport, as if they

were afraid of what they would see about them. In the centre of the city the devastation was the more remarkable because a few streets and squares had been left untouched. There were the usual food queues, the usual thin, unhealthy faces.

Palfrey took the others to the University Hospital, near the Zoological Gardens and overlooking the park and the river. Inside there was bustling efficiency. The out-patients' rooms were crammed; here the whole suffering of a nation was evident – mute, patient, terrible in its intensity.

Palfrey sent up his card to Dr. Mynhem, a man whom he had met in London. Mynhem came hurrying down the broad stairs, white-smocked, bearded, wearing *pince-nez*. He had once been a very fat man, but was now lean; his coat sagged about him, he was too small for all his clothes. But there was brightness in his eye as he pumped Dr. Palfrey's arm, greeted Drusilla and the others courteously, and took them upstairs. He had only a small room for an office. 'I am sorry it is so small,' he said, 'but there is too little space, the larger offices have been used for wards, we are managing somehow, Palfrey. Accommodation is so short. Now—how can I help you?'

'I'm here about van Doorn,' said Palfrey.

'Ah,' said Mynhem, and his eyes looked sad. 'That was a wicked thing, Palfrey. He went to see you, did he not?'

'Yes,' said Palfrey.

'He told me that he was going,' said Mynhem, 'but he did not tell me why. That was when he called here after he had been to Berlin. He was secretive, you understand, he would not tell me a great deal, but he was also greatly excited. He left in the highest of spirits, after he had asked me what I thought of you and' – Mynhem smiled – 'I had given him a satisfactory opinion!'

Palfrey murmured: 'Nice of you. So you don't know why he came?'

'I am not even sure that I wish to know,' said Mynhem, unexpectedly.

'I am afraid that he was killed because of his journey, my friend. I feel the burden of my responsibility is too great to take risks with myself.'

'Yes,' said Palfrey, 'of course. I don't want you to take risks. What I do want to know is whether van Doorn mentioned any other names besides von Kriess in Berlin, and whether he gave you the impression that he knew there was danger.'

'He gave me no names,' said Mynhem. 'As for danger …' He shrugged his shoulders. 'I do not know whether you understand our reaction to *physical* danger. We have been used to it for so long that we hide fear quite easily, without any particular effort. Life has been dangerous in every way for so long, security is the thing to which we have not yet grown accustomed.'

'I know what you mean,' said Palfrey. 'Did you see the body?'

'No,' said Mynhem, 'it was not brought here. I believe that the face was badly mutilated.'

'Face?' said Palfrey sharply.

'Yes, my friend—he suffered much before he died.'

# Chapter Fourteen

## Anna

Van Doorn's house had escaped serious damage.

It was grey, but had once been white. The garden was cultivated for vegetables where there had once been only flowers, tulips of great variety, tall and stately, inviting strangers to gaze. During the occupation, Mynhem had told Palfrey, van Doorn's house had been used by the Gestapo and kept in fair condition. Even the paths were in good repair, and there was a very old man working in the garden when Palfrey's car drew up.

Palfrey and the others got out and looked at the house. It had two floors, but it looked low. There was grace in its lines, and it fitted in well with the flat landscape beyond, for it was on the outskirts of the city. There were other houses near by which had not been greatly damaged, but all needed decorating – it was as if the searing breath of desolation had passed over every street, withered it, and passed on.

Charles said, awkwardly: 'We won't all barge in, Palfrey, will we?'

'I think so,' said Palfrey. 'Come along.' He led the way with Drusilla, and the old gardener put down his spade and stared at them, as if he had some dread memory of similar visitations. They passed out of his sight. Not far away was a small, dark man, who apparently had nothing to do. Palfrey knocked at the front door, which was painted white, although the paint was flaking and in places yellow wood showed through.

The door opened promptly, and a girl stood there.

She did not seem surprised to see them, nor embarrassed by so many strangers. She inclined her head courteously, and Palfrey handed her a note which Mynhem had given him, introducing them. She stepped aside and asked them in, speaking in English, although she shot a quick, puzzled glance at Stefan.

She was young, not much more than twenty-three or four, thought Palfrey. She had fair hair, cut short, parted in the middle and falling in soft waves to the middle of her cheeks. It was glossy with brushing. Her complexion was good, although she was much too thin. She wore a housecoat which had been patched and patched again, but it fitted well, and there was a hint of courage in the squared shoulders and the fitting waist, defiance of conditions and pride of appearance. She wore no stockings and her wooden shoes were dark brown in colour.

As she finished reading, her colour deepened, and she looked up at Palfrey. Her eyes were a clear grey. She was not beautiful, she was not lovely, but there was frankness in her gaze, in her broad nose, her smooth forehead and her squared chin. Her lips were full, wide, set gravely – until she looked up, when they parted and her eyes widened, as if she could not believe what the letter said.

‘Are you—Dr. Palfrey?’

‘Yes,’ said Palfrey.

She said: ‘Thank *God* you have come!’

She turned away hastily. He did not need to ask why, for he had seen the tears in her eyes. When she looked round again, however, she was smiling.

‘I am very glad to meet you, Dr. Palfrey. And …’ She looked from one to the other, Palfrey introduced them, she bowed gravely and led them into a large, low-ceilinged room. It was surprisingly well furnished, and for the first time Charles saw the legendary spotlessness of a Dutch home. There was perfection of cleanliness everywhere, little polish but evidence of the labour freely bestowed. There were skin rugs over parquet flooring, comfortable chairs and settees, odd tables and a radio set in one corner. In spite of the neatness, it had an air of being lived in.

‘Please sit down,’ said Anna van Doorn.

‘Thank you,’ said Palfrey.

‘Why have you come?’ asked Anna.

‘Because we want to find out what happened to your father,’ said Palfrey.

‘I hoped that was so,’ said Anna. ‘He is not dead; of that I am certain.’

Palfrey did not speak. Charles, after staring at her, suddenly turned his head and looked out of the window, as if he could not bear to look at her sorrowing face.

‘What makes you say that?’ asked Palfrey.

‘It was not *his* body,’ she said. ‘They said it was, but I am convinced that it was not.’

‘What makes you feel sure?’ asked Palfrey.

‘Because the thumbnail of my father’s left hand was split,’ said Anna, ‘and the thumbnail on the dead man’s hand was not split. The nails of all the fingers were of a different shape, also. I know that my friends believe that I am not reasonable about this, and for that reason I have said little, but I am telling you because he had such great faith in you.’

‘And you are quite sure?’ said Palfrey.

‘I cannot allow any doubt at all,’ said Anna. ‘*I* know his hands. Had the body been of my father, I do not think I could have gazed upon it without breaking down. I did not. It was not my father. It is supposed to be, that is all. I am quite sure that he is alive.’

‘Did you tell the police?’ asked Palfrey.

‘I told the police that I could not be sure,’ she said, ‘because the face was so horribly mutilated.’ She was quite calm; she had looked upon horrors and grown used to them. ‘Others who knew my father said that the body was his, and that was accepted as true.’

‘I wonder why the body of any other man should be substituted,’ murmured Palfrey.

‘I have no idea,’ she said, ‘but I think I know why he was taken away.’

‘Go on, please,’ said Palfrey.

‘And I think you also know, or you would not be here,’ said Anna. ‘He went first to Berlin, to see von Kriess about the radium. When he came back

he told me that he was sure you would set everything aside and try to find it, he was sure that it was in existence. So he flew to London. It is clear that others knew what he had discovered, and wished to know more from him.'

'It could be,' said Palfrey.

'It is,' said Anna. 'Why have you come, Dr. Palfrey?'

'To find the radium, of course.' Palfrey said.

Her eyes lighted up. 'So you are going to try?'

'I'm going to find it,' said Palfrey, gently.

'He was so sure,' she said, and took a step forward and pressed Palfrey's arm. 'He was convinced that you would fight for it, that you would know of its importance. And your friends are to help?'

'Yes,' said Palfrey.

'I also wish to help,' she said, simply.

'Of course,' said Palfrey, and she seemed surprised and relieved that he did not immediately tell her that it was impossible. 'The question is what you can best do to help.'

'I have also wondered that,' she said, 'because' – she smiled again, and released his arm – 'I also felt sure that one day you would come. There is little that I can suggest, in some ways I am so helpless, but—did he talk to you of Frau von Kriess?'

'No,' said Palfrey.

'She was here with her husband,' said Anna, 'and I will not have it said that she was anything but a good woman. She did much to help us while she was here, more than many of the Germans liked. She *was* a good woman. Now she is in Berlin, and her husband, and—it was my father's belief that she knew as much of the truth *as* her husband, or more. Did my father say that to you?'

'No,' said Palfrey.

'He would not because he was not sure,' said Anna, 'but he *felt* sure. There was another name he mentioned—a strange name, not German and not Dutch. I have tried to remember it but I have failed—I am sorry.' In her gravity she was appealing, her heart seemed to live in her eyes. 'One day I shall remember it. But there *is* one thing I can tell you,' she added, firmly.

'Yes?' said Palfrey.

'Since Hertingen I have been followed,' said Anna. 'In Rotterdam I am always followed. No one approaches close to me, and yet I see the men—always the same men—wherever I go. I have told no one, because I do not see how it can help the police, who have so much to do, but—sometimes it frightens me.'

'What are the men like?' asked Palfrey.

'One of them is so small,' she said. 'Smaller than I. He has a dark face, and a scar on his chin, and he is always touching his chin. The other man is hard to describe, because he is so ordinary. But I do not think you need go far to see them, Dr. Palfrey.'

'Are they here?' asked Palfrey, sharply.

'I have seen them from the window this morning,' she said. 'Sometimes

they pretend to be working, sometimes they are doing nothing. That small dark man—I hate the sight of him!' She paused, and then suddenly moved forward, not to Palfrey but to Drusilla. She put out her hands and Drusilla took them. She said with a catch in her voice: 'Please, make him believe me. I am telling the truth, it is not imagination. Make him believe me!'

'He does believe you,' said Drusilla.

'There is doubt in his eyes, as there is always in Dr. Mynhem's. I can see that doubt, I tell you my father is alive, they have not killed him; you must find him for me, you must find him!' She turned on Palfrey, and had he not taken her arms and stopped her she would have flung herself on her knees in front of him, 'I have told you the truth, you must believe me!'

'Now steady,' said Palfrey, smiling. 'I haven't doubted you. What you say is reasonable, you see. No need to mutilate your father's face beyond recognition, all they could reasonably want to do was to kill him. No point in torture, either, at this stage. There are simpler, subtler ways of making him tell them what he knows. Anna, we want your help, you know.'

She drew back, with her eyes glistening.

'I will do everything I can!'

'And the first thing you do,' said Palfrey, 'is to leave here, half an hour after we have gone, and walk to the centre of the city, along the main road. Is that clear?'

'Of course.'

'Just that,' said Palfrey, 'and make no sign if you see your dark man. Make no sign if you see us.' There was a lilt in his voice. 'This is the first time we have made real progress!'

'And—you *believe* that my father is alive?'

'Of course,' said Palfrey.

They left soon afterwards. She stood on the porch and watched them climb into the car, as grave-faced as she had been when she opened the door. She did not wave nor smile. They drove off, and she turned back into the house, closing the door quietly.

As she did so a man appeared at the side of the nearest house, an ordinary-looking man, poorly clad, who walked swiftly towards her house. From a smaller building not far off came another man, very small, with a black, ugly face.

They converged upon the front door.

The old gardener watched them, and then turned and went on with his digging, as if he knew that there was cause for alarm, yet could not stir himself to interfere.

When the car was round the first corner, Palfrey tapped Drusilla, who was driving, on the shoulder. She pulled up at once. Charles was in the middle of saying that it was crazy to leave Anna there, and Palfrey should not have encouraged her to believe her father was alive; for even if the body had been that of another man, there was little chance of getting van Doorn back alive.

He broke off in surprise when Palfrey opened the door.

'Come on,' said Palfrey, and Stefan, at Drusilla's side, opened his door and climbed out. 'Park half a mile further along the road, 'Silla,' went on Palfrey, 'we'll join you there. Come on. Charles! We're in a hurry!'

'But—'

'Dark man and vague man probably at the house now,' said Palfrey. The dark man was near when we arrived—didn't you see him?'

'No,' said Charles.

'You must learn to see through brick walls,' said Palfrey flippantly. He slammed the door, and smiled at Drusilla. 'No tricks,' he ordered, 'and park near a traffic cop!' He stood on the sidewalk until the car was out of sight, and then turned back towards van Doorn's house. 'A tricky approach is indicated,' he said. 'You stay near the front gate, Charles. Stefan and I will look round the back. If there should be trouble, weigh in with all you've got. It might be your chance for a spot of revenge,' he added, encouragingly.

'Can't I come?'

'No,' said Palfrey. 'Strict obedience to all orders is most necessary. We won't leave you out in the cold.' He patted Charles's shoulder, and the younger man went with some bewilderment along the road towards the front of the house. The old gardener was still working, and this time he did not stop.

Charles saw Palfrey and Stefan disappear behind a high hedge at the back of the house. He did not see them again for some time. Some realisation of the task he had been set came to him. He looked about him, half expecting and certainly hoping that strangers would approach the house, but the street seemed deserted now.

Palfrey and Stefan approached the back door quite openly.

They could not see the gardener nor Charles, nor could they see anyone inside the house, although the windows were built low and they could see into the back rooms. Palfrey reached the door, and Stefan looked into the nearest room. He was trying the windows, while Palfrey turned the handle of the door and found it locked.

'There is room for you, I think,' said Stefan.

He had a window open a little. Palfrey put his hand inside, and was able to touch the catch which fastened it. He lifted the catch off, and there was a loud snap. He waited for a moment, listening intently. The only sound he could hear was a low-pitched murmur of voices inside the house. He opened the window and climbed in. It was a dining-room, with a red-tiled floor and fumed oak furniture, the walls were painted with a frieze of tulip fields, beautifully done. He hurried towards the back door, opened it, and let Stefan in.

The murmuring sound was louder now.

They went on carefully. A closed door was between them and the hall. They stepped into the hall, and the murmuring became clearly identifiable now – a man was talking in Dutch. Palfrey did not know Dutch well enough to understand what was being said, but the threatening note was the same in

all languages. Yet he did not immediately go into the room from which the voices came, but opened the front door, softly. Charles was staring towards it. Palfrey raised a hand, motioning him away. Charles looked disappointed, but did well – he turned on his heel and walked briskly along the road, towards the centre of the city.

'He'll be all right,' Palfrey whispered to Stefan. 'Now!'

Stefan stretched out a hand and opened the door. He flung it back against the wall with a crash, and as he did so the little dark man swung round from the settee where the girl was lying, her dress torn at the shoulder, the red marks of fingers on her cheeks and terror in her eyes.

The vague man was standing by his side. He did not turn round, but rushed towards the window. Stefan moved forward, brushed the little dark man aside as if he were of paper, and gripped the other by the leg. The man turned to fight. Stefan struck him, only once, on the side of the jaw. The man collapsed and lay still, except for a queer, quivering movement as if he were shivering with fright even in unconsciousness.

The little dark man was standing quite still, with one hand close to his pocket.

'It's all right, Anna,' said Palfrey, 'and now we know that you weren't dreaming anything. Not even a nightmare,' he added, as he helped her up. 'What did they want?'

She answered in English, as she sat up, putting a hand to her bare shoulder, her fingers plucking at the torn cloth.

'They wanted to know—what you had—come for.'

'And we came just to see them,' said Palfrey. He turned on the little man, who moved his hand towards his pocket, but before he could insert it Stefan had stretched out a hand and gripped his wrist. The man squealed as pain shot through his arm, and he did not even try to loosen Stafan's hold. He seemed petrified. Stefan was so tall that he almost touched the low ceiling. He seemed quite undisturbed, and had not turned a hair.

'Will you go upstairs and change?' Palfrey asked Anna.

'Change?' she said, as if surprised. 'I—yes—yes.' She got up, swaying for a moment, and Palfrey gave her a helping hand, but she was annoyed at her own weakness, and walked proudly out of the room and up the stairs. Palfrey turned to the little dark man, and said: 'Let him go, Stefan.'

Stefan released him, but not until he had put his hand into the man's pocket and brought out an automatic. It was lost in the Russian's hand. Stefan pocketed it, and Palfrey looked into the dark man's eyes. They were nearly black but shot with amber, his only good feature, for there could have been few uglier men in Holland. Black hair grew low upon his forehead, only an inch of skin showed above his black eyebrows. It was a squat face, with broad features, thick lips and a flat chin on which was a long, dark scar.

'And what did Lozana tell you to do?' demanded Palfrey.

He spoke in English, and he scored a hit, for the man backed away, astonished. Stefan rubbed his ear, smiling. Palfrey seemed as if he were in

his consulting-rooms.

'I—I do not know such a name.' The man's voice was deep and harsh; he had been talking when they had broken in, it was like a rumble of badly oiled machinery, a voice as ugly as his face.

'You know such a name and you had instructions,' said Palfrey, 'and unless you tell us what they were, *now,* all that has happened to van Doorn, all that would have happened to Anna, and all that ought to happen to every Nazi terrorist in Holland will happen to you, at once.' He shot out his clenched fist and struck the man on the chest, heavily enough to send him reeling into Stefan. 'At *once!*' snapped Palfrey, and made as if to strike again. What were your orders?'

The man said: 'We were to watch—the girl.'

'Go on.'

'And if you came—'

'How did you know us?'

'From photographs,' the man said.

'Go on.'

'We were to find out what the girl told you,' said the dark man. He did not hesitate now; his spirit, never strong, had crumpled beneath that one blow and the look of savagery which had appeared on Palfrey's face.

'And after that?' asked Palfrey.

'We were to—report.'

'To—whom?'

'Laander—Hans Laander.'

'His address?'

'It—it is near the Mass Dyke, in Groote Street; it is a store. Laander is well known in the Market; he—he will deny sending me, he is well known, I tell you, no one will believe he sent me, but it was from him the orders came. Lozana knows him.'

'How well do you know Lozana?' demanded Palfrey.

'He has been in Holland sometimes, I have met him.' The man was shivering now, as if he were afraid of the consequences of his admissions. 'He will blame me—'

'I will look after Hans Laander,' said Palfrey.

So far it had been easy, almost too easy.

They were out of the house in a quarter of an hour, and met a rather aggrieved Charles only a hundred yards along the road. He stopped being aggrieved when he saw Anna. Myna and Keyser, securely trussed up, were in the cellar and were not likely to get away without help, and Palfrey doubted whether help would be forthcoming. The only possible source was the old gardener, but Anna had assured him that the man would not take any interest. He was simple—he had lost every member of his family during the bombing, and had not been quite right in the head since. Anna made the statement in a matter-of-fact voice which caused Charles to stare at her as if he could not understand what made her so calm. Charles was seeing an

unfamiliar aspect of life, and it bewildered him.

Anna asked no questions, and it was not until they were in the car and Drusilla was driving again that Palfrey asked her whether she knew Hans Laander. 'Of course,' she said.

'So he's well known.'

'He is a very great man,' said Anna; 'he did much for us during the occupation.'

'Look out!' exclaimed Charles, suddenly.

He spoke to Drusilla, for a lorry was coming across the road towards them, as if out of control. Drusilla wrenched the wheel, the car swung close to the pavement and squeezed past the lorry. People on the pavement turned and shouted after it, and Palfrey looked over his shoulder, wondering if it had been intentional, an attempt to crash into them. He saw the streams of cyclists, the crowded pavement, for they were in the Buersplein, the Square where so few of the great buildings remained intact, where the devastation seemed to have reached its height.

Then, without warning, something struck the road in front of the car. There was a sheet of flame, a roar—and the car was lifted into the air and smashed against a wall.

# Chapter Fifteen

## Some Damage

Palfrey did not lose consciousness, but he wavered on the borderline for what seemed a long time. He was aware of the red and yellow flash; it seemed to be in front of his eyes continuously. The roar had deafened him, and he could hear nothing, but he could see people, or the heads and shoulders of people, through one of the windows. He did not feel pain, except at the back of his head. He turned his head and saw Drusilla. She was crumpled up against Stefan, and Stefan's hands were moving, as if he were trying to ease her weight off him. Palfrey made an effort to help, but could not move.

Two men helped him out. He stood dizzily on the side of the car, looking about him, not properly understanding what had happened. He felt not only dazed but silly. They helped him down to the road, where the police had cordoned off a wide stretch. Then he became aware of other groups of people, men and women stretched out and others bending over them, stretchers, ambulances, cries of pain and anxious faces. Not an unfamiliar sight to him, yet it tore at his heart. These people had been hurt in the explosion, the explosion that had been meant to wreck his car and kill its occupants.

The others were brought out from the car, one by one. Now, that Palfrey was out, men managed to get down into the car and lift out first Charles and then Anna. Charles was having a violent introduction, thought Palfrey – and then he was suddenly in a panic about Drusilla. He had not thought of her before, his mind had been blank; now he swung round and stared towards the car, and saw her being lifted, shoulder- high, by two men. Her eyes were open. Then men put her down on a blanket, and Palfrey, ignoring his companion, reached her side, went down on one knee.

'I'm all right,' said Drusilla.

But was she? Palfrey began to explore, new life was in his fingers. Someone, possibly a doctor, wanted to take his place, but he would not let him, and a heavily built man said in English:

'He is doing well enough.'

As far as Palfrey could tell, Drusilla was not badly hurt. Nor, it proved, were any of the others. Stefan was suffering from slight concussion; he was the only one of the four who was taken to hospital. The crowd gasped in amazement when they saw his size.

Palfrey and the others were led or taken into a restaurant, and given tea, hot, strong and sweet.

Palfrey found a telephone and called the Consulate. There was a man named Clive, a cousin of Bobby Fairweather's, on the staff. Through him

Palfrey arranged that Drusilla and Anna should be taken to the Consulate while he and Charles were interrogated by the Dutch police. The friendly Dutchman obtained a police car, and Drusilla and Anna were driven off.

The temporary building which housed the police station was just behind the Buersplien, within walking distance. They had to go for a little way along one side of the Great Market, behind the square. Across a dozen buildings in the market was the name: *Hans Laander.*

At the police station, the friendly man touched Palfrey on the arm, and said: 'I leave you please. It is a great pleasure to know you.'

Palfrey beamed at him. 'You have been wonderfully good. It helped so much because you could speak English.' He took out his cigarette-case, flicked it open and proffered it – and the man's eyes widened at the sight of a dozen tightly packed English cigarettes.

'No, no!' he said. 'No, no, no!'

'Yes,' said Palfrey. He emptied the case and put the cigarettes into a hand that did not know whether to be reluctant but somehow did not draw back until it had closed on the precious gift. The man looked about to burst into tears.

Inside the entrance hall, Palfrey said to Charles: 'Things are still bad.'

'Bad! They're ghastly,' said Charles. 'I'd no idea that Holland was in such a mess. I'd read this and that in the papers, but it didn't really strike home.'

'It doesn't,' said Palfrey, 'but it should.'

In a large room, barely furnished but very polished, sat a plump, round-faced man, one of the first well-fed men Palfrey had seen in Holland. He had a coarse, reddish skin, small blue eyes and a tiny mouth. Palfrey thought he had seen him before somewhere. He was the Chief of Police, he said, and he had given instructions for Palfrey to be brought to him, not only because there had been a telephone call from the British Consulate, but because he had heard of Dr. Palfrey.

'And I know of no one I would rather meet,' he said, in fair English.

'Good!' said Palfrey. 'Tell me, do you know Hans Laander?'

'*The* Hans Laander?' asked the Chief of Police.

'I suppose so. The man with premises in the market-place.'

'He is our very good friend,' said the other. 'Why do you ask, Doctor?'

Palfrey said: 'One of the prisoners named him.'

'Hans *Laander*! It is absurd,' said the Chief of Police. 'He was fooling you. Doctor, I have no 'doubt of that. *I* will talk to the man!' He raised a telephone and gave instructions for" the two prisoners to be fetched from van Doorn's house.

The old gardener was watching a body of armed police approach the house. He stopped digging and looked at them with incurious eyes. They forced one of the windows, and one man climbed in and opened the door from the inside. Two were posted on the porch, and the others went in.

They went immediately to the cellar, which was fitted with electric light. The sergeant-in-charge switched it on, blinked, and looked round. At first he

was inclined to think that the whole thing was a hoax, for the cellar was empty. He searched carefully, however, and came upon some pieces of cord; obviously the cord had been cut recently, for the ends were hardly frayed. He came reluctantly to the conclusion that he had arrived too late.

The old gardener said, in a sing-song voice, that he had noticed nothing, nothing at all, nothing at all; and there was fear in his voice and his eyes, fear out of the past.

They treated him gently, knowing his tragedy, and went back to report. Later that day Myna and his companion were found murdered, no chances being taken that they might talk.

# Chapter Sixteen

## Hans Laander

If this man were a rogue, thought Palfrey, he would never again trust a face!

Laander, dressed in black, was a man of medium height, frail-looking, white-haired, with a white moustache and a pink complexion. His was the face of a saint, with eyes of china blue just then aglow with pleasure. He held out his hand, and his grip was surprisingly firm. 'I am very glad to see you, sir.' He also spoke English, even more fluently than the woman, who stood smiling in the background. 'And I am more glad to see a friend of my friend van Doorn. May I know your name?'

'Palfrey,' said Palfrey.

'I wondered if you were Dr. Palfrey,' said Laander. 'Come with me, please.' He led the way upstairs, into a large room which surprised Palfrey, for it was littered with books and papers. Even the bookshelves lining the walls were untidy; some had not been dusted for a long time. There was an old roll-top desk in one corner, several small flat desks, a dozen kitchen chairs, although the chair at the roll-top desk was padded and comfortable-looking. The room presented an amazing contrast.

Laander led Palfrey to the one comfortable chair.

'Thank you,' murmured Palfrey.

'Have you seen Anna van Doorn?' asked Laander.

'Yes. She told me what she thinks.'

'I cannot believe that she would make such a mistake,' said Laander.

'Nor do I,' said Palfrey, 'and I've told her so. When did she first tell you what she thought, sir?'

'When she returned from seeing the body,' said Laander. 'Is that why you have come to see me?'

'No,' said Palfrey. He was wondering how best to approach this subject, and decided that bluntness would get him further with Hans Laander than any attempt at roundabout approach. 'I am looking for the men who attacked van Doorn,' he said, 'and I think one of them was here not long ago.'

'*Here!*' said Laander. Colour flooded his cheeks. 'That is impossible, Dr. Palfrey, I would not see such men!'

Was his indignation a little too emphatic? wondered Palfrey, looking into those clear blue eyes. He decided that it was not; Laander was a man without pretence, who would show what he felt without trying to hide it – and now he felt hurt but not offended.

'You would hardly know much about him,' said Palfrey. 'A man from South America, named Lozana.'

'*He* came,' said Laander, 'but that was on business.'

'May I know what business?' asked Palfrey.

‘There is no reason why you should not. He has been before; he is an agent for a large fruit-growing company in South America, and he came to arrange for the shipment of fruit – which is badly needed here, Dr. Palfrey, desperately needed. I have been able to arrange for many shipments to come during the winter, and it will be invaluable to eke out our food supplies. I now deal in most commodities.’ He looked gravely troubled as he sat, with his hands clasped, in front of Palfrey, upright in his chair. ‘I am at a loss to understand you, for Lozana is a man of goodwill. I dealt with him many years before the war.’

‘I don’t doubt that,’ said Palfrey, ‘but he has no goodwill towards you. He wanted it believed that you were working with him—against van Doorn.’

‘I will *see* this Lozana,’ said Laander, grimly.

Palfrey smiled. ‘Not just yet, I hope, and never about this business. It would be better for him to think that he made me suspect you.’

‘But why should he do that?’ demanded the Dutchman.

‘That is one of the things we have to find out,’ said Palfrey. ‘There are many other things. Were you a close friend of Piet van Doorn?’

‘I like to believe that he had none closer,’ said Laander.

‘Did he confide in you before he left for Berlin?’

‘No,’ said Laander, slowly. ‘No, he refused to do so; he told me only that he was going to see you when he had left Berlin, and I knew that he was in great excitement. He would not tell me more because there was a possibility of danger, and’ – Laander gave a gentle smile – ‘he believed that I had suffered danger enough, Dr. Palfrey. I did not insist, for I have much to do, and it is better that I should continue to look after the building up of food supplies, which task has been entrusted to me by the Government.’

‘Oh,’ said Palfrey. ‘And you can arrange shipments from South America?’

‘Of course.’

‘And shipments to South America?’

‘What little there is to ship, yes,’ said Laander.

‘What were you supplying in exchange for fruit?’

‘Nothing from Holland,’ said Laander, ‘but much from the East Indies. Chiefly rubber, for our plantations are beginning to produce again. It is not my business to arrange the payment of these goods, Dr. Palfrey, that has already been done; it happens only that I know what is to be arranged. I cannot see that rubber from the East Indies could affect van Doorn and his quest in Berlin and London.’

‘Nor can I,’ admitted Palfrey.

‘Your visit has greatly distressed me,’ said Laander, after a pause. ‘I believed that Lozana was a man who could be trusted. Now—are you *sure* that he knows of the attack on van Doorn?’

‘I’m afraid so, yes,’ said Palfrey. ‘Is he coming to see you again?’

‘I do not expect him, but he may,’ said Laander.

‘If he does, don’t say that I’ve told you more about him,’ said Palfrey. ‘That is really important—you will be careful, won’t you?’

‘If it will help.’ Laander was doubtful and obviously troubled. His face

was very grave, and Palfrey wondered again if it were possible that he was acting, that he was a party to whatever Dias was doing. It seemed incredible, and yet Laander *was* a dealer in food in a big way, as Garon had been and, in a different fashion, Jacques Midaut.

'It will help,' Palfrey assured the old man.

He went straight back to the *Guyder Hotel* where Bruton, Erikson and de Morency had rooms. De Morency was there, and reported that Lozana had not left the Consulate again. Erikson and Bruton were still watching, but were not enamoured of the prospect of a night-long vigil; it was getting cold.

'I don't see much point in their waiting there,' Palfrey said. 'Lozana can slip out fairly easily—we want a couple of dozen men to make a job if it. Having lost Lozana in Paris, we may as well lose him in Rotterdam.'

He was not feeling quite so glum as he sounded. It seemed to him that Lozana would do nothing to lead them to any place which mattered. Probably he hoped that they would spend their time watching him—while Dias, wherever he was, got ahead with the main business.

Palfrey did not wait to see the Americans, but went to the British Consulate. He wanted to telephone Brett, but Brett was out of London.

Charles and Anna were back, Palfrey fancied that there was more animation in Anna, a hint of excitement and colour in her cheeks. Yet she was grave, as if the fount of laughter had dried up within her, and the best she could do was to smile with tolerant amusement at Charles's wisecracks.

Charles was trying hard to break through her reserve, but many of his efforts did not ring true. At heart, thought Palfrey, he was still feeling blue.

Drusilla had told Anna that they wanted to spend the night at her house; that was one of the things, it proved, which had cheered the girl up. She was desperately anxious to repay what she called her debt to them.

The Consulate car, with chauffeur, was still at their disposal. They left immediately, and talked little on the journey.

There were no incidents. Palfrey was mildly surprised when they reached the house without trouble. It was grey in the beam of the headlamps, which the chauffeur kept shining on the house until Anna had opened the door with her key and switched on the hall light. Then he drove off. The light in the hall was dim, and after the flare of the powerful headlamps it seemed dark.

Palfrey heard a faint rustle of sound.

He pushed quickly past Anna, trying not to alarm her, looking towards the corner whence the sound had come. There was a door leading to the kitchen. Anna came after him quickly.

'Please, what is it?' she demanded.

'I thought I heard someone move,' said Palfrey.

'Naturally,' she said. 'It would be Henrik.'

'Henrik?' echoed Palfrey.

'The old man,' said Anna, 'the man who works in the garden. He would come to open the door, thinking I was alone, and hurry away at once when he knew that you were with me. He is so shy, and he dislikes strangers.'

‘Oh,’ said Palfrey.

‘He is quite faithful,’ said Anna, answering his unspoken thoughts. ‘There is a small room near the kitchen, he sleeps there.’

Palfrey nodded, but felt uneasy as he turned away. As he did so the old man slipped across the passage from the kitchen to his room. They all saw him, a tall, drooping figure, his eyes towards the ground. He disappeared without a sound, and Anna put on the kitchen light. She was determined to make coffee. Palfrey made a mental note to see that her stocks of food were replenished from the stores in the jeeps.

There were four main bedrooms. One had a doll’s-house character and charm. It was large and yet the furniture was small and slender, the twin beds were covered with pretty chintz, matching the curtains, and the thick-piled carpet was plain, pale blue. It was Anna’s room, and she suggested hopefully that perhaps Drusilla would like to share it with her. Palfrey groaned inwardly, but gave smiling assent when Drusilla glanced towards him.

Another room with twin beds, more solidly furnished, was next to it; Palfrey and Charles were to share the second room.

While undressing, Charles suddenly became more talkative.

He did not mind admitting, he said, that Paris, Antwerp and now Rotterdam were getting him down. He had heard so little laughter, seen so little animation – except false, brittle laughter and unnatural vivacity. Everyone seemed to work by clockwork. And it was a damned shame that Anna van Doorn was tormented as she was. Couldn’t Palfrey see that she hardly dared think about her father – or about other things, for that matter? Something, said Charles, ought to be done about it.

‘Yes,’ said Palfrey. ‘That’s what we’re hoping. Get to sleep, old chap. We might not have an undisturbed night.’

Outside, the Chief of Police made a tour of inspection of his men, for he wanted to make sure that nothing could go wrong. Nothing stirred, no light showed, it grew very cold; the women slept, Charles slept, Palfrey was sometimes dozing, sometimes wakeful. There was something he did not understand, something constantly prodding at his mind, something which he ought to see but could not. At last he fell asleep.

He woke up suddenly, with a sound echoing in his ears. He heard the next bed creak, and Charles said in a whisper:

‘What was that?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Palfrey, and then jumped, for the sound which had woke them up came again – a thunderous banging at the front door.

# Chapter Seventeen

## Back from the ‘Dead’

Drusilla was on the landing and Anna just behind her, peering down the stairs. The knocking had ceased again, but started up as Palfrey and Charles, shivering in their pyjamas, hurried down the stairs. Drusilla followed them, caught up with Charles in the hall, and put his overcoat about his shoulders; she had Palfrey’s over her arm. Anna was coming down the stairs.

‘All right!’ called Palfrey.

He opened the door, not quite knowing what to expect, except that he was sure that he would see members of the police cordon. The sight of the Chief of Police, a chunky figure in a greatcoat, with two men by his side and two others just behind him, came as a complete surprise. He did not at first notice that the two men at the rear were carrying a third.

‘Hallo,’ said Palfrey, inanely.

‘Let us in, please,’ said the Chief of Police, with a note of suppressed excitement in his voice. ‘Let us in—Miss van Doorn, please do not worry, we have good news for you, extremely good news—*good* news!’ He was so shaken out of habitual calm that he talked like Dorninade. ‘Your *father* is back!’

Anna pushed past Palfrey.

Palfrey stood aside, with Charles and Drusilla. The Chief of Police stumped in, and then the two men followed, carrying the third. It was van Doorn, unconscious.

Palfrey asked: ‘Has he seen a doctor?’

‘No, no, he has only just arrived.’

‘Take him upstairs,’ said Palfrey. ‘Anna, don’t get in their way.’ He took Anna’s arm, and she stared tensely after the two men as they went upstairs, Drusilla leading the way. They took van Doorn into the bigger bedroom, and Palfrey followed with Anna. ‘He will be all right,’ he said, but he could not be certain; he was most wary of this development, although he hardly knew why.

‘Can we have a better light?’ he asked.

The Chief of Police said: ‘Yes, if there is a bulb.’

‘We have a more powerful one,’ said Anna. She slipped away like a wraith, to return with another electric-light bulb. She fitted it in without turning the light off, and the greater radiance filled the room and shone on van Doorn’s pale face. He was breathing, and there were no visible marks of ill-usage.

‘We can’t have everyone in the room,’ said Palfrey.

The Chief of Police gave orders, men disappeared, and Charles and Drusilla went out, leaving only Anna, the Chief of Police and Palfrey. Anna was loosening her father’s clothes. He was dressed in a soiled nondescript

suit, his beard was matted, his hair overlong, and he looked incredibly dirty, as if he had crawled through mud and it had dried on him. The girl showed no embarrassment, and worked as if she were a trained nurse. Palfrey helped her, relieved to see no marks of violence on van Doorn's body. Gently, he felt the back of the old man's head.

'A bump,' he said. 'Knocked out, that's probably all.' He turned back van Doorn's eyelids; the pupils were normal, there was no evidence that he had been drugged. 'Yes, just knocked out,' he said to Anna, and gave her a reassuring smile. 'Is there a hot-water bottle?'

'Yes.' She went out, swift as a deer.

'Are you sure that is all?' asked the Chief of Police, incredulously. 'He is just knocked *out!*'

'And at the point of collapse because he's been starved, I think,' said Palfrey. Undoubtedly van Doorn was much thinner than when Palfrey had last seen him, and there were lines on his face and dark patches beneath his eyes, which suggested that he had been through a great deal – yet he was not only alive, he was in no danger. What *could* this mean?

Anna came in. 'Mrs. Palfrey will bring the bottle,' she said. She stood by the side of the bed, looking down at her father – and then suddenly she went down on her knees, not in tears, not in collapse, but with her hands pressed together and her face lifted towards the ceiling. Her lips moved; the words were not audible, but they were words which could have been understood in any language: she was praying.

Palfrey said: 'What happened?' He was in a corner of the room, and he spoke in an undertone.

'It was an incredible thing,' said the Chief of Police. 'There was a car coming near, and we were very watchful, for we knew what you expected. The car drew up at the end of the road, it had only the side-lights showing. It stopped there. We could have caught the driver had we expected him to do what he did, but we thought the men would come nearer to the house. Instead, they threw van Doorn into the road—there were three men, I saw them with my own eyes—and then drove off. I did not even give the order to open fire, they were moving off before I could do so. I hurried forward, and' – he shrugged his shoulders – 'that is what I found.'

'Odd,' said Palfrey, 'but good of you to be there in person. You're a great help.' He was watching Anna thoughtfully. She was looking at her father now, and for the first time he saw her lips curve in a smile. There was happiness in it, happiness and a great contentment. She stood up slowly when Drusilla came in carrying two stone hot-water bottles. Charles was hovering outside the door.

'Keep him warm, and he'll come round before long,' Palfrey said. You won't need to keep a man with him, sir, will you? We can report what he says.'

'I would like to stay myself,' said the Chief of Police, and promptly stifled a yawn. 'But perhaps you are right! I shall leave some men, of course.'

'Please. What time is it?' asked Palfrey.

‘After six,’ said the Chief of Police.

‘No more sleep for me tonight,’ said Palfrey.

He had never felt more wide-awake, nor had the others. They left Anna with her father, and went to dress. When Palfrey returned to the bedroom Anna was sitting by the window, looking out at the first faint light in the eastern sky, and smiling to herself. Palfrey beamed down at her, and she stood up.

‘I will dress now,’ she said, ‘and go downstairs. Call me, please, when he wakes up.’

‘The very moment,’ Palfrey promised.

Van Doorn sat up in bed, still pale and dirty. An hour had passed since he had come round, and he had talked a great deal, more than was good for him, but it had been so heavy on his mind that Palfrey had not tried to restrain him. The story, from the moment that he had touched down at Rotterdam airport, was simple enough – far too simple, thought Palfrey, although Charles was smiling with satisfaction, and looked almost smug.

Anna was downstairs. A woman who came to help her clean the house was with her. Outside, several policemen were still on duty. It was a clear warm day after an early-morning frost, and the bright sun gleamed on the water, making it look like a sheet of silver touched with gold.

At the airport van Doorn had been met by a taxi-driver, one of the few in Rotterdam, a man whom he had seen about before. He had been driven away, the driver had taken a wrong turning, people had sprung out from behind a cottage and seized van Doorn. He remembered being injected with a hypodermic needle, but nothing else until he had come round in a small room of a house which he did not know, and even now he did not know whether the house was in Rotterdam or further afield.

In his room the only window had been painted black, and the only light he had been allowed was a few hours a day from a single electric bulb.

For three days no one but an old man had come near him. He had been given a diet of bread and water, and little enough of that. Then there had come a visitor. Van Doorn had heard a car draw up, had expected his caller – and yet had been startled, even frightened, by the man who had entered, *wearing a shiny black mask.*

That, Palfrey had been able to assure him, was the second appearance of the black masks in the wake of Dias.

Weakness from lack of food had heightened the effect on van Doorn, but he had withstood the shock. The man had talked in broken English, and van Doorn had found it difficult to understand.

He had wanted to know what van Doorn had told Palfrey.

Van Doorn had refused to talk, had been threatened but not beaten, and left alone for another two days. Then his visitor had come again, in the same grotesque trappings. He said that he knew what van Doorn had told Palfrey – about the radium. There had been threats, this time against Anna, not van Doorn himself. Van Doorn had seen little point in refusing to speak, since

they knew or suspected the existence of the radium. He had answered most questions, but had refused to say whether Palfrey had promised to come on the quest. That had not worried his interrogator. The man had left him for another two or three days; van Doorn had lost count of time, and by then was feeling ill, for his diet was not increased. There had been more questions, or rather the same questions put in different form, trap questions obviously designed to find out whether he had told Palfrey anything else.

Then the man had gone, and not come back. Van Doorn had expected to be taken to his death when two strange men, neither of them wearing masks, had taken him from his room, bandaged his eyes and bundled him into a car. He remembered hearing a woman's voice. There had been a long journey, a stop for the night, another journey – he was unable to see where he was going because of the bandages – and, finally, he remembered being knocked over the head.

'Can *you* understand it?' he asked Palfrey.

'I'm afraid so,' said Palfrey, and Charles's smug smile faded.

'Then please explain,' said van Doorn.

'They have another interest,' said Palfrey, treading warily; van Doorn might also be touchy on the subject of Black Market. 'I had some idea before, now I know that there's a secondary mystery. They thought you knew something about that. They decided that you didn't. If they seriously thought that you had told me anything besides the radium, the blow over the head would have been a trifle heavier.'

'I am at a loss,' said Van Doorn. 'You mean that they no longer think you are aware of their real purpose?'

'That's it, in a nutshell,' said Palfrey, 'and it isn't very reassuring.' He smiled. 'Except in one way. There isn't likely to be further danger for you and Anna.'

'I am certainly not sorry about that,' said van Doorn, 'but I cannot understand why they should do these things. And why, as Anna has told me, some poor fellow was murdered and they pretended that I was dead. It makes no sense.'

'Wrong,' said Palfrey. 'It makes sense, but we can't see it. Deep, clever, cunning game—I've been too much inclined to underestimate Dias. But you don't know Dias, do you?' he asked, with a smile. 'A South American gentleman of some persuasiveness and personality. He—'

'*Fernandez y Dias,*' breathed van Doorn.

Palfrey snapped: 'Do you know him?'

'But of course I know him!' cried van Doorn. 'He was here in Rotterdam on the day that the Germans left. He was actually at the hospital part of that day. I had met him before; he was at the Castilian Consulate when the Germans were here, several times. I had operated on one of his staff, and met him then. He pretended to be pleasant, but he was not a man whom I liked, I distrusted him. Why is he interested in this?'

'I can't answer that one,' said Palfrey, and added ruminatively: 'Yet. I expect Charles can! Have you any idea what Dias was up to?'

‘He was very friendly with the Germans.’

‘Yes. We’d gathered that,’ said Palfrey.

There was nothing more to be done there. He did not think that van Doorn would be in further danger, although he was glad that police were still outside, keeping watch. Because he could not see what purpose there would be in taking Drusilla away just then, he left her there with Anna and van Doorn, and went into the city with Charles. His knee was still painful, but there was no sign of inflammation; it was more nuisance than anything else. They caught a tram half-way to the Square, and passed the spot where the bomb had exploded the previous day. The wreckage of the car had been removed, but there was still grim evidence of the attack.

De Morency was at the *Guyder Hotel,* and he, for once, was in low spirits.

‘My dear friend,’ he said sarcastically, ‘I do not think your ideas are so good as they are made out to be. Since last night, when we could have taken Lozana without any difficulty, he has never once been alone. And he has seen people of great importance—Government officials, especially those to do with the importing of food. Do you know what he is doing here?’

‘No,’ said Palfrey.

‘No!’ cried de Morency. ‘No, the great Dr. Palfrey does *not* know. The answer is—beef!’

‘Ah,’ said Palfrey.

‘He is negotiating with the Dutch for a supply of *beef!* Beef, I tell you! He is an authorised agent of his country, and the Dutch treat all people who can supply food with great respect. Oh, they think Señor Lozana is a wonderful man!’

‘I’m inclined to agree with them,’ said Palfrey.

‘Beef!’ cried de Morency. ‘Have you gone completely dull in the head, Sap? Would the official agent of a Government be also dealing in Black Market? And is radium necessary for *beef!*’

Palfrey laughed.

‘I wouldn’t put anything past Lozana and Dias. Nor should you: beef needn’t make you turn up your nose like that. In fact,’ went on Palfrey, ‘if Dias and Lozana are doing a bit with the Black Market on the side, the Dutch Government might be inclined to turn a blind eye.’

‘Nonsense!’ snapped de Morency.

‘You’re not at your best,’ said Palfrey. ‘They might feel it wise. If they upset Dias they might upset his Government and so lose a lot of food. Dias would be able to blackmail them, if it came to that. “Do it my way, or I will sell to a country where I can get a big rake-off.”’

‘I do not believe that it could be done successfully,’ said de Morency, still sceptical.

‘I am prepared to believe almost anything of Dias,’ said Palfrey. ‘A cable or two to Dias’s home town will probably be enough to check that he *is* an official agent.’

‘You need not trouble,’ said de Morency, ‘there is no doubt about it.’

‘All right,’ said Palfrey. ‘According to Laander, he is selling food in return

for rubber.'

'With which to erase oneself,' said de Morency, scornfully. 'I think it is an excellent article.'

Palfrey laughed and looked at Charles.

'Here were have the mercurial Frenchman! In five minutes, he will probably be falling on my neck and telling me what a wonderful man I am. Don't let it worry you too much, Raoul. We got off on the wrong foot, but we've often done that before. Nor can we blame ourselves—no one took particular pains to help us.'

'It has perhaps passed the attention of Dr. Palfrey that we are looking for *radium,*' said de Morency. 'Also, that we equipped ourselves for a great expedition, we expected to be digging all over Germany, and—and—'

'Digging may come later,' said Palfrey. 'We prepared against all emergencies, that's all.'

'All! Sap, when *are* we going to start the work we came here to do?'

'We've started all right,' said Palfrey. 'I can't wave a magic wand and say *abracadabra* and conjure the leaden containers out of the air. When we've got to the bottom of Dias's activities we won't be so far from the radium. I know one thing we want before we can go much further.'

'What?' asked de Morency, sourly.

'A report on Dias's travels in the last weeks of the war,' said Palfrey.

'Oh, something quite easy,' said de Morency, and unexpectedly he laughed. 'I am sorry, Sap. It is this country. The pain they feel is so deep that it hurts even me, and I thought I had been hurt badly enough in France.'

From the hall a young girl came hurrying, shiny of face and wearing a white overall which was darned and patched until little of the original material seemed left. She smiled at de Morency, who had a way of making girls smile at him, and said 'Telephone' in Dutch. De Morency hurried out, was gone for five minutes, and then returned in some excitement.

'Have you got something?' asked Charles, eagerly.

'I have some information,' said de Morency. 'Sap, that was Neil; he says that Lozana is at the *Maas Hotel* with—'

'Go on!' cried Charles.

'I am giving Sap a chance to redeem himself,' said de Morency. 'Would you care to guess, Dr. Palfrey?'

'I don't know,' said Palfrey. 'William K. Bane or Josh Anderson.'

De Morency's face fell ludicrously. '*Quel diable!*'

'Interesting and not unexpected,' said Palfrey. 'You know, we've started from the wrong end, it's time we found out what their purpose is in Europe. Pay no attention to Raoul, Charles, and don't worry if he gets apoplexy, that is quite normal with him! We'll be at the British Consulate,' he said as he went out.

Charles walked briskly by Palfrey's side towards a big hotel, one of the few which had remained practically undamaged.

Outside they saw Erikson, talking with some vivacity to a uniformed

policeman. He did not make any signal to Palfrey, so presumably he had nothing to report. There was no sign of Bruton.

They were in the main hall, and Palfrey was approaching the desk, for he wanted to make this a formal visit, when he heard Charles speak in a low-pitched voice: '*Sap!*'

'Hallo,' said Palfrey, half turning.

'There's a goatee in there talking to Muriel,' said Charles.

The full significance of his words did not at first sink in. Palfrey was too intent on studying Charles's face. Charles had received a shock, a deeper shock than the name 'Muriel' should have given him. He was pale, too, and he stared as if he could not keep his eyes off the couple he had seen.

'That decent kid I told you about in London!' he snapped, when Palfrey did not answer immediately. 'The nurse—but for her I would probably have given the whole game away. She's talking to a man with a grey goatee beard.'

'So she is,' said Palfrey, and looked at the couple. 'What are you trying to do—mesmerise them?'

'Er—sorry,' said Charles, turning his head quickly.

'The grey goatee belongs to no less a person than William K. Bane,' said Palfrey, 'and that's an interesting coincidence, isn't it? I—Great Scott, man, *now* what's the matter?'

For Charles, looking in another direction, gaped as if he had received an even greater shock. Palfrey followed the direction of his gaze.

Walking down the last flight of stairs was a tall, thick-set man who looked familiar, and yet Palfrey could not place him. Charles took a hesitant step forward, and then the newcomer saw him and his face lit up. He and Charles moved towards each other, hands outstretched.

'Well, well, *well!*' cried Charles, in a more natural voice. 'What the devil are you doing here, Matt?' He pumped the other man's arm, then turned and beckoned Palfrey. 'Sap, this—you'll never believe it—is my brother Matthew!'

'How are you, Dr. Palfrey?' asked Matthew Lumsden. He smiled – a rather superficial, supercilious smile, Palfrey thought. He judged Matthew Lumsden to be a dry stick, an earnest young man, who probably often felt resentful towards his younger brother, a prodigal now the apple of his father's eye.

'Nicely, thanks,' murmured Palfrey.

'What are *you* doing in Rotterdam?' demanded Charles, afresh.

'I'm on business,' said Matthew. 'Sorry, Charles, I mustn't stop now, I'm due at a conference.' Matthew looked the type of man to whom business conferences were the substance of life. 'You'll be here tonight, I hope?'

'Yes,' said Charles.

'That's fine, that's fine, old man—cocktails, here, at half past six. I must rush now. See you later, old chap! Perhaps you can also make it, Dr. Palfrey?' Matthew did not seem particularly anxious, he probably regarded Palfrey with suspicion, as Palfrey was not big business. 'Good-bye.'

He hurried off.

‘Now that *is* a coincidence,’ said Charles. ‘I’d no idea he was out of London. He used to travel a lot before the war, of course—he’s the Old Man’s right-hand man. Not like prodigal Charles! Er—I hope that hasn’t spoiled anything for you, Sap. I mean, caused a delay.’

‘Muriel and the goatee are still talking,’ said Palfrey.

‘Ah, yes.’

The encounter with his brother had lifted Charles out of himself; but the effect did not last for long. Palfrey was still puzzled by the younger man’s reaction. Charles knew, of course, that he had been far too greatly affected by Muriel, and had tried to cover it up, but he did not wholly succeed. He was on tenterhooks, and he hesitated for a long time before he spoke.

Bane and Muriel seemed absorbed in each other.

# Chapter Eighteen

## William K. Bane

'I suppose I'd better not let her see me,' said Charles.

'Why not?' asked Palfrey. 'All these people know you're in Rotterdam by now.'

'But Muriel—'

'Don't worry too much about Muriel,' said Palfrey; 'I thought you said she was under their domination.' He wanted no championship from Charles at that juncture. 'Hop outside and tell Erikson, will you, and make sure he sees Muriel for future reference.'

'And then?' asked Charles.

'Saunter in,' said Palfrey, 'but if I'm in deep conference with William K. Bane, leave me for a while. You look after Muriel,' he added, and Charles went off, glad there was something he could do.

Palfrey did not, after all, send in his name.

He walked into the large lounge, the door of which was standing open. It was curiously bare-looking, and there was no carpet on the floors. The *Maas Hotel* had suffered badly from German looting. But there were comfortable chairs, and in one of these Muriel was sitting, cross-legged, attractive in her demure fashion. She glanced curiously at Palfrey, while Bane continued to talk to her in an undertone. It looked very much as if Bane were smitten by the girl.

Bane was toying with his gold watch-chain, which had two loops on either side of the buttonhole through which it was threaded. He wore light-grey tweeds, and even sitting down he looked exceptionally tall and remarkably bony. His kneecaps poked against his trousers, there was little flesh at the back of his hands, and his cheeks were sunken. It gave him something of the appearance of a skeleton, if there could be such a thing as a handsome skeleton; for William K. Bane was undoubtedly good-looking. His goatee beard was a silky brownish-grey, and his hair waved back with affected carelessness.

'And like I was saying, honey,' he said, 'you don't want to waste your time on a guy like that—no, ma'am, you just don't want to waste your time. See here, now, this is the way I see your position.' He went on talking, but lowered his voice, for Palfrey chose to stand near, with his back towards them, as if looking for friends.

Then Palfrey turned. Bane looked up at him in annoyance, yet Palfrey felt quite sure that both the man and the girl knew who he was.

'I beg your pardon,' said Palfrey, apologetically, 'but I wonder if you happen to know whether Mr. William K. Bane is in the lounge?'

Bane said: 'Sure. Right here.'

'Here?' echoed Palfrey, as if surprised.

'I'm Bane,' said Bane. 'I don't recall your face.'

'Oh no,' said Palfrey, 'no, you wouldn't.' Uninvited, he took a chair facing them, then seemed to remember himself, bobbed up and bowed to Muriel, and sat down again. 'I'm Palfrey,' he said, 'a friend of a friend, I think.'

'Is that so?' drawled Bane. 'Who is this mutual friend?'

'His Excellency Señor Fernandez y Dias,' murmured Palfrey.

'You a friend of Dias?' asked Bane, with no great interest. 'All right, son, what is it you want?'

If he did know Palfrey, he was acting well. The muscles of his cheeks moved as he spoke but his lips did not seem to part. He kept fingering his watch-chain, and looked as if he would be glad when Palfrey had taken his departure.

'The pleasure of meeting you,' said Palfrey.

That startled Bane, but he looked sceptical. 'Is that so?'

'That is so,' said Palfrey, and glanced at Muriel. 'I have heard a great deal about you, Mr. Bane, a very great deal.'

'Well, I hope you're not disappointed,' said Bane. 'And if you don't mind, Mr. Palfrey, I'm busy right now. I give interviews between nine and nine-thirty, come and see me one morning.'

He nodded dismissal.

'Oh yes,' said Palfrey. 'I've overstayed my welcome. Sorry.' He stood up, looking at Bane's watch-chain. He did so because the man was always toying with it, he had not let it rest all the time they had been talking. Now he pulled one end from the pocket. From it dangled an old-fashioned, silver match-case, several medals and something which shone black. Palfrey tried to look away quickly, but Bane seemed to sense what he had seen, and covered the shiny black thing with a broad thumb. 'I'll see you later, Mr. Bane. My regards to Josh Anderson.'

He turned away.

Bane was on his feet in a single movement, and he shot out a hand and grabbed Palfrey's shoulder, swinging him round again. He was almost livid with anger, and the girl looked genuinely startled. 'What in hell do you mean by that?' snapped Bane.

'My dear sir,' protested Palfrey, wriggling beneath the other's grip, 'regards to a friend, no more than that. You *are* a friend of Josh Anderson's aren't you?'

'Now listen to me, Palfrey, I won't stand for insolence.' The pressure of Bane's fingers increased, and he stood an inch or more higher than Palfrey, his grey eyes very hard. 'You had some special reason for talking about Anderson.'

'I have a special reason for everything I do, including seeing you,' murmured Palfrey. 'Do you mind?' He put his hand to Bane's wrist and gripped. Bane gasped and his grip relaxed. 'Thanks,' said Palfrey, and then raised his voice: 'Charles!'

Charles, near at hand, swung round and strode towards them. Other people were watching them, but most of them incuriously; they had learned

bitterly the lesson of taking notice of what other people did.

'Charles,' said Palfrey, while Bane started at him angrily, doubtless still feeling the pain in his wrist and forearm, 'have you ever seen this before?'

With a sudden movement he whipped out Bane's watch-chain and selected the shiny black thing from among the dangling oddments. It was a miniature mask, hideous and grotesque, the face of a man without eyes.

'Great Scott!' gasped Charles. 'Why, that's—'

'Enough!' said Palfrey. He took Charles's arm and turned before a startled Bane could do anything to stop him. He hustled Charles out of the lounge, but did not immediately leave the hotel. Instead he looked through the open doorway, seeing Bane staring towards him, the girl resting a hand on the American's arm.

'Sap,' breathed Charles, 'do you know what that was?'

'Your black mask in miniature,' said Palfrey.

'Yes. I—what the devil was *he* doing with it?'

'He would doubtless tell us that it was a curio, a good-luck charm or an heirloom,' said Palfrey, 'and who is to say him nay? Not I,' declared Palfrey, and they hurried towards the street together. 'Muriel didn't appear to recognise you, Charles.'

'Well, that isn't surprising,' said Charles. 'I was a pretty fine mess when she saw me; I'm not really back to normal yet, you know. What did you do to the old boy to make him flare up like that?'

'I asked him to give my love to Josh Anderson,' said Palfrey, 'and that's a very curious thing. But I think we'll spoil the effect if we go and see Josh now.'

They turned towards the Maas Bridge, which was just ahead of them, still undergoing repairs, but they had not gone ten yards before they heard running footsteps behind them. They turned – and Bane was on them, a wild figure, gaunt and angry. He was running too fast to stop without banging into Palfrey, who withstood the onslaught with only a grunt.

'Give it me!' gasped Bane.

'Give you what?' asked Palfrey.

'That lucky charm!'

'Lucky charm?' said Palfrey. 'Oh, the little black thing. Ugly piece, wasn't it? Have you lost it?'

'You know darned well you've got it,' said Bane, trying to speak with dignity, conscious now of the incurious gaze of many passers-by and the interest of a uniformed policeman. 'Hand it over, Palfrey.'

'I assure you—' began Palfrey.

'*Hand it over!*' cried Bane, and drew back his hand as if to strike Palfrey, who stood quite still and looked at him as if bewildered by this show of violence. Bane's arm dropped. 'Palfrey, if you don't give back that charm, I'll have you put in the lock-up.'

'But how vindictive!' said Palfrey, pained. 'I haven't got it. Have you looked under the chairs?'

'Palfrey—'

‘Try not to act the fool,’ said Palfrey, sharply.

He turned. Bane shot out a restraining hand, but Palfrey struck his wrist away and, before Charles realised what he was doing, slipped into the road. He threaded his way among streams of cyclists, hand-carts, dog-carts and a few petrol-driven vans and cars. Charles plunged after him. A cyclist jammed on his brakes and only just saved himself from falling. William K. Bane plunged after Charles, but crashed into a dog-cart, slipped and fell. The uniformed policeman hurried towards him, while Palfrey and Charles took the first turning out of the High Street and found themselves among a desolation of bombed-out buildings, with a few wooden huts built here and there.

‘You certainly put a move on,’ said Charles. ‘Have you got it?’

‘Of course I’ve got it,’ said Palfrey.

They walked for half an hour, Palfrey limping more with every minute, until at last they reached the Consulate.

‘Now what?’ asked Charles.

‘A car,’ said Palfrey.

There in the courtyard was an old Mercedes-Benz. De Morency had worked his miracle. By the car stood a chauffeur, who offered his services. Palfrey thanked the chauffeur and said that he would prefer to drive himself.

He drove at once to Bane’s hotel, the green Mercedes-Benz attracting much attention, and found Erikson on the edge of a crowd about the entrance to the hotel.

Palfrey pulled up behind Erikson.

‘A sensation?’ he asked.

‘Some sensation!’ Erikson said. ‘The person of William K. Bane was assaulted by three policemen, because when they picked him out of the road and wouldn’t let him follow you he went berserk—I guess I’ve never seen a man go quite so crazy. They had to carry him in.’

‘Did anyone go with him?’

‘A cute little dame,’ said Erikson.

‘Muriel!’ exclaimed Charles.

‘Doesn’t he get to know them fast?’ said Erikson, mockingly. ‘What did you do to him, Sap?’

‘I haven’t yet worked it out,’ said Palfrey. ‘Hop in.’ As Erikson was getting into the back of the car, he added: ‘Where’s Corny?’

‘At the back entrance, I guess.’

‘We’ll collect him,’ said Palfrey.

Five minutes later, with Bruton and Erikson in the back, he drove at a fast pace towards the suburbs, until he came within sight of van Doorn’s house. There were two or three armed policemen at hand, and he had never been more glad to see them. He pulled up outside the house, and they went in a bunch towards the front door. It opened, and Drusilla stood on the porch to greet them.

‘All well here?’ asked Palfrey.

‘Yes.’

‘Good!’ said Palfrey. ‘Is van Doorn awake?’

‘Yes, reading.’

‘Tell Anna we’re here,’ Palfrey said.

Van Doorn was propped up against his pillows. He had been washed, and his beard was clean and trimmed. The ravages which the past fortnight had made on him were all too evident now. He put his book down immediately Palfrey entered.

‘You appear excited, my friend,’ he said, and his voice was only an echo of the voice with which Palfrey had become familiar. ‘Have you some news?’

‘Of a kind,’ said Palfrey. ‘You may be able to help again.’ He sat down at the side of van Doorn’s bed, his fingers playing with the ‘charm’ which he had pulled from Bane’s watch-chain. ‘You remember the man who was wearing a black mask?’

‘I remember it only too well,’ said van Doorn. ‘I can laugh at it now.’

‘I don’t think it is to be laughed at,’ said Palfrey, and took the charm out. ‘Is that exactly the same?’

Van Doorn stared at it in obvious surprise, stretched out his hand and inspected it closely. He did not speak at once – he did not burst out, as Charles had done, to say that it was exactly the same, and he seemed to be in some doubt. Palfrey waited, in a fever of impatience.

‘I think it is,’ said van Doorn, ‘but that is not the only remarkable thing about it, Palfrey. I have seen one of those before—several times before.’

‘Ah!’ said Palfrey.

‘Dias had one, on his watch-chain,’ said van Doorn. ‘He had a habit of playing with it when he did not think anyone was watching him. I often saw it. And there were others—several of the Gestapo had similar things. It did not strike me when I saw the large mask, but now it does. Where did you get it?’

‘From an American millionaires’ said Palfrey. ‘Did von Kriess have one?’

‘I did not see him with one,’ said van Doorn.

‘You’ve only seen them on Dias and Gestapo officials?’

‘Yes.’

‘Thanks,’ said Palfrey, and put it in his pocket.

He looked hazy and a little vacant, but his mind was busy. One of those little tokens had been in Lozana’s suit-case, together with the list of names. That was probably a measure of their importance.

‘It’s a pity,’ he said; ‘I hoped you’d be able to give me a long list of people who wore them. You couldn’t have made a mistake about where you have seen them, I suppose?’

‘No,’ said van Doorn,’ I have not made a mistake, Palfrey. Why are you so interested in it?’

‘Its owner nearly threw a fit when he lost it,’ said Palfrey, ‘and he isn’t a man who throws fits as daily exercise. I—Hallo,’ he called out, for there was a tap at the door. ‘Come in, cherubs!’

It was Charles, with Anna just behind him. Charles was excited, Anna’s eyes had much more than their usual brilliance. That in itself was a cheerful

sight.

'Sap,' said Charles, without preamble, I was telling Anna about the mask charm, or whatever you call it. She's seen them before.'

'On Dias and Gestapo officers?' asked Palfrey.

'Oh, that was long afterwards.' The words spilled out of Anna. 'At one time it was the emblem of active resistance in Rotterdam. You did not know that, Father, you were not allowed to join the resistance because of your work, but I was with it and there were, of course, many others. Only the leaders had such a mask as that—always it was hidden carefully; many who were caught by the Germans swallowed it rather than allow it to be discovered; but it *was* discovered. On the night after the battle of Arnhem started it was discovered, and afterwards there was such a purge of resistance leaders, that dreadful purge. You remember that,' she added, looking at her father sorrowfully.

'Yes,' van Doorn said, slowly.

'Most of the little charms were destroyed,' said Anna, 'but a few were left. I believe that Hans Laander has one now. He had one before, and he escaped the purge. They were used to gain admittance to secret meetings,' she added, 'and for many other purposes; the possession of one of those in the early days of the occupation was a pass into every loyal home. I am quite sure of this,' she added, sharply, for Palfrey looked at her almost as if he could not believe what she was saying. 'There is no doubt.'

'Of course not,' said Palfrey. 'And they haven't been used since Arnhem?'

'No.'

'Yet they reappeared on Dias and Gestapo officers.'

'They were taken as souvenirs,' said Anna.

'They might have started off as souvenirs,' said Palfrey, 'but they have more significance now.' He handed her the little mask, and she examined it closely. 'Is it exactly the same?'

She said: 'There is one thing different.'

'What is it?' asked Palfrey.

'The chin was smooth and rounded,' she said; 'in this it has a cleft.' She indicated a tiny mark with her finger-nail, and Palfrey took it to the window and examined it more closely.

'Carved afterwards,' he said; 'you can see the marks of the knife or chisel. It's Burmese blackwood, nearly as enduring as ebony.' He tossed the little thing into the air, and the sun caught it and made it glint. He was not looking at it, but out of the window, and he was not surprised when a car came along the road, sleek and glistening beneath the sun, and pulled up outside the front gate. Policemen moved towards it, and then dropped back, for only one man stepped out, the man who had been driving.

It was William K. Bane.

# Chapter Nineteen

## Mr. Bane Makes an Offer

Drusilla admitted Bane. Palfrey was standing in the dining-room, listening to what was said, but he got very little reward for his eavesdropping. All Bane said was that he wanted to see Palfrey, and he certainly meant to stay. Drusilla showed him into the sitting-room, opposite, and closed the door.

Palfrey tucked the charm into his pocket and went towards the sitting-room door, pausing outside for a moment and then entering.

Bane said: 'Palfrey, I'll pay you ten thousand pounds in gold for that charm.'

'It's handsome of you,' said Palfrey, 'but it can't be done. You've changed your method, haven't you? Your first offer was in lead.'

Bane's expression did not change.

'The next offer might be in cold steel,' he said. 'That charm is worth plenty to me, Palfrey, but it's worth nothing to you. Maybe you don't think I mean it when I say ten thousand in gold. When I say a thing I mean a thing. That's my offer, and it won't go higher. You'll be wise to take it.'

'I almost wish I could,' said Palfrey.

Bane said: 'Listen to me, son. I'm older in the tooth than you are. There was a time when you were able to get around and do good stuff; I know about you and your friends. This time it isn't your field. That was war, and this is what they call peace and you're hamstrung; if you're honest with yourself you'll admit you're hamstrung. Leave it to me, Palfrey, and when I get to the end of it you can have your radium, and it won't cost you a penny —or a cracked head.'

'Is Josh Anderson of a like opinion?' asked Palfrey gently.

'You can leave Anderson out of this,' said Bane.

'That's the trouble, I can't,' said Palfrey.

'I guess you'll have to,' said Bane. He hesitated, then stepped abruptly to the window. 'Listen, Palfrey, I'm not fooling you. Come with me. I'll show you why you've got to give me that charm. You won't get hurt if you stay close enough to me—they won't try shooting me up.'

Palfrey said: 'Until this thing is over I don't go anywhere with anyone unless I've company of my own choosing.'

'Bring whom you like,' said Bane, carelessly.

'You were asking about Josh Anderson,' Bane said.

The man on the bed *was* Anderson. Palfrey knew him well enough to be sure. Only that morning he had been at the hotel with Bane and Lozana; now he looked close to death. He lay there with that uncanny stare and gave not the slightest sign that he knew anyone had entered the room.

Palfrey looked up at Bane.

‘Why this?’ he said.

‘They pumped poison into him,’ said Bane.

‘Why?’

‘Because he didn’t come to heel,’ said Bane. ‘And because he wouldn’t part with the charm. They got it from him. Lozana found it this morning—he went to see Josh first. There was a row. This followed. Anderson was safe while he had that little charm, Palfrey, but only until then.’

‘And the same applies to you?’ said Palfrey.

‘Not to me,’ said Bane; ‘I’ve told you, they want my money. They knew they weren’t going to get any of Josh’s, he was fool enough to tell Lozana so. For twelve months Josh and I have been working to find out what Dias is after; we’ve strung Dias along, but Josh got mad—that was his trouble, he always got mad too easily. It doesn’t pay to get mad. The one good thing was that he told them they could still get their money from me.’

‘Money for what?’ asked Palfrey.

‘A great number of things,’ said Bane, ‘and the most important I don’t yet know. I hope to—tonight.’

‘Why tonight?’

‘Because tonight there is going to be a meeting,’ said Bane, ‘and they’ll talk some.’

Palfrey said: ‘I would like to attend that meeting.’

‘Don’t be a fool,’ Bane said, sharply. ‘The moment they saw you they would slit your throat. This isn’t a game.’

‘No,’ said Palfrey, ‘but I would still like to attend that meeting. What time is it?’

‘Around midnight.’

‘Where is it?’

‘I don’t yet know. They’ll send a guide for me. And they won’t let me be followed, Palfrey, they’ll take care of that. Don’t try to come, it won’t be worth while to make your wife a widow. When it’s over I will tell you what I learned.’

‘With reservations, I’m afraid,’ said Palfrey.

Bane said: ‘I’ll tell you what I learn.’

After a long pause Palfrey inserted his thumb and forefinger into his pocket and handed the charm to Bane without a word Bane looked at it – and his broad thumb moved all over it as if seeking something out. It seemed to pause near the chin When he had satisfied himself that it was the right one, he said slowly: ‘I’ll play ball, Palfrey.’

‘I hope you will,’ said Palfrey. ‘Are you coming out?’

‘I’ll stay a while with Josh,’ said Bane.

Outside, the three men strolled casually along the street before they reached their car. Palfrey was talking. At all costs they must get another charm; according to Anna there had once been many in Rotterdam, and Laander had one. They go into the car and drove off, and as they passed the nursing home they saw a curtain move at a first-floor window, and Palfrey caught a glimpse of Bane against the dim light in the room.

They drove round two blocks, and Palfrey pulled the car up not far from the nursing home, but out of sight of it.

'Keep him in sight whatever you do,' he said. 'If we lose him we might lose out altogether. I'll be at the *Guyder* after ten o'clock.'

'We won't lose him,' Bruton said.

Palfrey left them, and drove through the gathering gloom towards Groote Street. He parked the car outside Laander's house and knocked at the door. The woman opened it in exactly the same way as she had done the previous night, her expression forbidding until she recognised Palfrey. Then her eyes lit up, and she stepped aside.

'He is still busy,' she said, 'he has been working all the afternoon, he has not come down since lunch-time, Mynheer. It is good that you have called, it will make a rest for him.'

'I'll try to make him take a long one,' smiled Palfrey.

'You are good, Mynheer.' She pulled her skirts high as she mounted the stairs. There was a dim light on the landing, but Hans Laander's door was closed, and there was no light beneath it. Palfrey was not thinking of that; he was wondering whether Laander would part with the miniature mask, whether he could cut a cleft in the chin to make it good enough to gain him entry at the 'meeting'. Him, or one of the others – it might be wise to send Bruton or Erikson, that had not yet been decided.

'The room is in darkness,' whispered the woman, 'perhaps he is sleeping.'

'I have most urgent business,' said Palfrey, 'but if you wish I will wait for a little while.'

'We will see,' said the woman. 'Hush!' She tapped gently on the door, but there was no answer. She opened it softly, and the light spread into the room. At first she could not see clearly.

It was Palfrey, looking over her shoulder, who first saw that the room was in chaos, papers scattered over the floor, desks and tables overturned, drawers open and leaning drunkenly from cabinets – a scene of disorder which, when the woman realised what she was looking at, made her gasp aloud and turn to Palfrey.

'See!' she cried.

Palfrey switched on the light. Then they could see the whole room. Laander was lying on the floor in a corner, in a pool of brownish-red, and a brownish-red mark was across his neck, a gaping wound.

# Chapter Twenty

## The Meeting-place

Why?

'Perhaps because I had been to see him,' said Palfrey, in a low voice. 'Perhaps …'

His voice trailed off. He knelt again by the body, seeing that the pockets had been searched; some of them were turned inside out, and the contents were strewn on the floor about him. The corner of an envelope was stuck in the coagulating blood. He stood up and went to the telephone, and gave van Doorn's number.

Anna answered him.

'Anna,' said Palfrey, 'this is most important. You remember the thing which you identified for me? Don't name it.'

'I remember quite clearly,' said Anna.

'Who else retained one, do you know?'

'Who else besides Mynheer Laander?' she said. 'I do not know. Few kept them, Mynheer, because they were so dangerous; most of them were destroyed when the truth about them was learned by the Germans.'

'Try to remember someone else who kept one,' urged Palfrey.

'I have been thinking of them since you left,' said Anna, 'and I can recall no one, no one at all. Cannot Hans Laander help you?'

'No,' said Palfrey, 'not now.'

There was a pause, after a gasp, as if Anna understood something of what had happened from the gravity of his tone. Then she spoke again, steadily.

'Is he there, Mynheer?'

'He has been killed, Anna.'

'So he has been killed,' she said, 'and—and *you* require the little thing, for—vengeance?' Her voice did not rise, she seemed quite self-possessed, but he could imagine how hard she fought to keep her self-control.

'Yes,' said Palfrey.

'You may find it,' she said, 'if you look in the fitting of the electric light over the desk.'

The secret messenger came for William K. Bane at a quarter to eleven. The man made no attempt to avoid notice, and asked for Bane at the desk. Bruton, who was standing near the revolving doors heard him. Erikson was at the back entrance of the hotel, and Bruton walked through the lounge past the messenger, and into the street.

'Front door, Neil,' said Bruton.

'Okay,' said Erikson.

Palfrey went to van Doorn's house without any intention of staying for long.

Anna let him in. She looked at him reproachfully; she wanted to help the woman who looked after Laander

'It won't be safe yet,' Palfrey said. 'Please believe me.'

She did not press her point.

Palfrey went upstairs to the bedroom which he had used the previous night, and Drusilla followed him. He took out the make-up box which he had taken from the luggage boot of the car, opened it on the dressing-table, and looked at her smilingly.

'Do you feel like a hairdresser?' he asked.

'I suppose you must go,' said Drusilla.

'Yes,' said Palfrey. 'Mine is the only face that will lend itself to deception. I am, as you have doubtless noticed, a perfect Little Willie.' He handed her a pair of clippers.

They worked for half an hour, and then Palfrey went downstairs into the living-room where Charles and Stefan were talking together. Stefan looked startled at first, Charles positively jumped.

'Who the devil are you?' he snapped.

'Not the Devil,' said Palfrey, in his normal voice.

Palfrey still waited outside the door Erikson had shown him.

A woman appeared, walking swiftly, warning him by the rustle of her clothes. She pressed the bell – long, short, long – and the door opened and she disappeared.

'Good enough,' murmured Palfrey.

He went back to the front door, opened it, then let it close behind him. It was possible that it sounded a bell somewhere in this building, and that if the bell did not sound he would immediately be suspect. As it was, he might be called upon to give a name. If he were …

He pressed the bell, one long push, a short, a long.

The door opened.

He stepped into a large, bare room, where a man was standing by the door, a tall, spindly man who looked at him blankly, so blankly that Palfrey did not speak to him but crossed the room towards yet another door. Apparently that was the proper thing to do for he was not questioned. He hesitated by the door. If a code were necessary for this one he would be finished. He tapped boldly. There was a pause, and he tapped again, more impatiently. The door was opened, and he found himself in a cubby-hole, not much larger than a telephone kiosk. A man was standing behind a hatch on his right, a man who held out his right hand.

Palfrey took the little black mask from his pocket.

He did not let it go, but held it out.

'Come!' said the man behind the hatch, impatiently.

Palfrey dropped it into the outstretched palm. He looked past the man to a shelf where there were two boxes, one smaller than the other, and in each of the boxes, lying like black gems on cotton wool, were other charms. The man placed Palfrey's carefully in position in the smaller box, and handed

him a small red card with a clip for a buttonhole. Then the door opposite that through which Palfrey had entered opened of its own volition.

'Let it be a dim light!' prayed Palfrey.

It was dim, smoky, noisy – the noise of people gathered together, talking one against the other, a gathering which was not remarkable; one such could be seen a thousand times a week in London or any other big city. Men of all shapes and sizes, a few women, much smoking, the brittle laughter often found in a bar – and there was a bar, the light was brighter there than anywhere else, and a man in a white smock served drinks as quickly as he could take money. Everyone wore a red or yellow card in a lapel or pinned to a dress.

Palfrey espied a corner where only two other men were standing, and took his place by their side. One gave him a vague smile, a smile perhaps of welcome, and then looked towards the crowded room. It was worse than a theatre buffet during the interval. Glasses chinked, people laughed, a woman was talking at the top of her voice. He could see only the top of her head when a man standing in front of her moved. He watched all the women closely – and suddenly he saw 'Muriel,' talking to a man whom he had not seen before.

There were a hundred people in this room, and more were coming in. Most of them kept their hats and coats on, for in spite of the fug it was cold. Palfrey peered through the haze of tobacco smoke and caught sight of Bane. He did not see Lozana or Dias.

'It *can't* be a speakeasy,' Palfrey said to himself.

It was as much like one as anything else, except that no one waited on the people – they fetched their own drinks. He watched the money change hands. Guilders and florins slid across the wet bar; there was very little change, prices were extremely high, as they were wherever liquor was sold illegally.

Palfrey fingered his red card, then noticed that by far the majority of the people had yellow ones. Muriel was one of those. Bane had a red one.

'Gentlemen!' A voice called out from the murk at the far end of the room. 'Ladies and gentlemen.' The hubbub had prevented Palfrey from hearing 'Ladies' the first time. 'Be ready to take your seats, please.'

'Oh, no,' said Palfrey to himself, 'not a peep-show!'

Bane was putting a hand on Muriel's shoulder, and bending down to speak into her ear. She laughed delightedly, and gave him a playful punch. Palfrey was watching them intently, and did not notice the man who approached him and stood by his side.

The man coughed.

Palfrey started, and looked at him.

'Good evening,' said the other in bad Dutch.

'Good evening,' said Palfrey, in worse.

'How long do they usually keep you here?' asked his companion, a thick-set, ugly man with beetling brows.

'It varies, I think,' murmured Palfrey, wary now, for this might be a check

on him.

'Already it has been too long,' said the other. 'It is a great waste of time. So much theatricals—bah! Why do they think I come to waste time here? I have much to do. Where are you from, Mynheer?'

'Oh—various places,' murmured Palfrey. The question echoed and re-echoed in his mind; in it there was the making of serious danger. He did not trust this ugly, florid-faced man with the close-set, narrowed eyes.

'Ach! You do well to be careful,' said his companion, 'but you need not fear that I will say anything. I am here for the first time, I do not like what I see. These drunken fools—I am not here to buy liquor.'

'Nor am I,' said Palfrey.

'Certainly not!' said his companion, and laughed harshly. 'That is good—we are not here to buy liquor! I came to speak to you because I was watching you—you showed your contempt for these fools. A contempt I feel, also. Shall we sit together?'

'I would like to,' murmured Palfrey.

'Good! I hope there are no women—I do not trust women,' said the other, looking about him where there was at least one woman to every four men. 'They cannot keep their mouths shut. Oh, some are all right,' he added grudgingly, 'but I do not trust them, they are too emotional.' He tapped Palfrey on the shoulder. 'You take my advice, and do not use them. Only sell to them! And if you want more advice, come to me—I am good at dispensing it!' He laughed again; he had small, yellowish teeth, widely spaced, and when he laughed Palfrey could see right into his mouth. 'Karl Gleber, of Aachen— everyone knows Karl Gleber in Aachen!'

A bell rang.

Take your seats, please!' cried the attendant, 'take your seats, please!'

'Let us go,' said Karl Gleber of Aachen.

There was a crush in a doorway at the far end of the room. Half a dozen men finished their drinks hastily and banged down their glasses to be refilled. Several others stood on the fringe of the crowd – and Palfrey saw that most of those, like he and Gleber, wore the red cards. He fingered his own as he joined the crush. There was a curtained doorway, and a steward in a short white jacket and green trousers was holding the curtain aside. The people streamed through. Palfrey caught a glimpse of a small auditorium and a stage where the footlights were already on, and from which soft music was coming; he could see the heads of the men in the orchestra in the pit in front of the stage. His disappointment was so great that it actually entered his head to make an excuse and to leave.

'Please,' the steward said, and pointed to a door which Palfrey had not noticed before. It was marked in Dutch, Belgian and French: '*Private*'.

Gleber, just ahead of him, went through that doorway. Palfrey followed. He expected to find himself in a box, thinking that the red cards were emblems of rank and that the wearers would have a better position in the theatre. He was startled when he found himself first in a long, red-walled passage with Gleber and several others ahead of him, and more startled

when, in the room at the end of the passage, he found about thirty chairs set out in front of a platform, as for a meeting. There was a table on the platform, and three wooden armchairs. As he moved towards a seat at the back of the rows, pulling at Gleber's coat to prevent Gleber from going too near the front, a man walked on to the platform – vast, impressive, superlatively well dressed.

It was Dias, a happy Dias, who was beaming and rubbing his hands. The diamonds in his rings glinted beneath the light which shone upon his glossy head.

The lighting in the room was much better than in the theatre or in the bar.

# Chapter Twenty-One

## The Meeting

Lozana joined Dias, and another man sat in the third chair, a stranger to Palfrey, a man with heavy features and who, Palfrey was sure, was Dutch. Several men followed Palfrey, including Bane, who stalked past him and took a seat near the front. His head with its wavy hair was clearly visible behind that of a man who was completely bald.

The seats were nearly all filled; Palfrey counted thirty people.

'Is that all?' called Dias, from the platform, and to Palfrey's astonishment, he spoke in English.

'There are no others,' called a steward from the back of the room. 'That is all, sir.' He had a strong Dutch accent.

'Excellent!' cried Dias. 'Close and lock the door, please!' There was a hushed silence, until the sound of bolts being shot broke it. Most of the people took no notice, but several of them, including Gleber, looked over their shoulders uneasily, as if they were a little alarmed by the fact that they were locked in.

'Now, gentlemen,' said Dias. 'I would like—'

Gleber leaned towards Palfrey. 'Good! No women.'

'Good,' echoed Palfrey, cursing the man, for he had missed Dias's opening sentence.

'All of us know the purpose of this meeting,' said Dias. 'It is my great pleasure, gentlemen, my very great pleasure, to be here to meet you, some of you for the first time. I have always been delighted, delighted indeed, to be able to assist you in the way that I am doing. Now, gentlemen, there is one thing which I must say at the beginning. We—'

Gleber nudged Palfrey. 'Talk,' he whispered, 'nothing but talk. Who wants to listen to that fat bullock?'

Palfrey gulped. '*I* do,' he said.

Gleber started to guffaw, and then stifled the roar. Dias glared at him, several people 'hushed' him, but he sat there grinning, in no way embarrassed. Palfrey was. They were looking at Gleber, but they could not avoid seeing him; Dias might see something familiar in his face. He felt as if he had on no disguise, for a moment he was afraid that Dias would point an accusing finger. He was half prepared to get up, and he thought of the locked and bolted door.

'I do, then, impress upon all of you, gentlemen, the great importance, the greatest importance, of the utmost discretion,' said Dias. 'You cannot, of course, work *entirely* on your own, you must have help, but let it be understood that the *source* of your supplies is never whispered, never breathed, to anyone in your townships. Have I your agreement, gentlemen?'

There was a murmur of assent.

‘The old fool,’ said Gleber, ‘what does he think we are? Children? Or old women?’

‘We know what there is for disposal tonight,’ said Dias, ‘you have had full particulars. We will, please, maintain the pretences, we will pretend that we do not know what the *real* commodities are—the real goods, yes. So we will take them in numbers. Number 1 on the list, we have a limited supply, so I will take tenders—my good friend Juan will take tenders. Please.’ He looked about him inquiringly, hopefully. Lozana sat with a pencil poised.

A man from the body of the meeting said:

‘Five hundred.’

‘A box,’ said Dias.

‘A box.’ The man spoke good English.

‘There, then, we have an excellent beginning,’ said Dias. ‘Five hundred a box. It is a fair price.’

‘Six,’ said a man from the far end of the room.

‘Six,’ said Dias, ‘you see, we are fair, we are extremely fair, we are reasonable. Six hundred a box.’

‘Seven!’ roared Gleber.

Dias beamed at him. ‘Seven, gentlemen, seven hundred a box! It is clearly understood that the highest bidder has the first choice, the first choice always; there will be an arrangement with the others for any surplus supplies. Seven hundred a box.’ He paused, his hands raised, all he needed to make him the complete auctioneer was a hammer. ‘Excellent! Seven hundred—your name, sir, please.’

‘Gleber,’ roared Gleber – ‘Karl Gleber, Aachen.’

‘Thank you, Herr Gleber.’ The horse laugh was obviously forgiven. Dias beamed at Gleber. ‘At seven hundred pounds there are fifty boxes for disposal; place your orders.’

Gleber took twelve boxes; others ordered some, the last man getting two that remained, but – boxes of what? Palfrey badly wanted to know. One possible explanation of this fantastic auction – for it *was* an auction – was obvious: Black Market. Lozana was writing swiftly on a sheet of paper. The men who placed the ‘orders’ all gave their names and the town from which they came. Three came from Rotterdam, two from Antwerp, two from Paris; no other place was mentioned more than once.

Palfrey saw that the men were studying slips of paper. Gleber was not; he was sitting back, fully satisfied, grinning broadly. He nudged Palfrey.

‘No memories, no memories—a man wants a memory. I see *you* don’t need to refer to paper.’

‘Oh no,’ said Palfrey.

He leaned forward. There was a short man in front of him, studying his list. Palfrey pretended to have trouble with one of his shoes, kept leaning forward and managed to catch a glimpse of the paper. It was in English, printed in block letters and headed: *For Disposal.* Immediately beneath it was: 1: *Nails.* 2. *Small saucepans.* 3. *Large saucepans.*

The man in front of him made a mark against an item lower on the list,

and then folded up his paper.

'Nails, small saucepans, large saucepans—nonsense!' thought Palfrey. The words stood for something else, of course, there was a code.

He had forgotten the nearness of personal danger, for it seemed to him that all he had to do was to keep quiet, and nothing would happen to him. Some of the men were obviously recognised by Dias, but others were apparently not known there, for Lozana had to ask for a name to be repeated, and before he made an entry he looked down his list. He made a tick, then booked the 'order'.

Nails–saucepans. Could these people be dealing in *arms*

Dias was on his feet again, smiling genially.

'Gentlemen, we have disposed of Item 1. We come, then, to Item 2. They are for disposal by the hundred, the price we require is per *hundred* please.'

'A hundred!' roared Gleber, making Palfrey jump.

'Thank you, Herr Gleber, one hundred is offered, one hundred—please, gentlemen, do not think that I am greedy, I want you all to be fully satisfied; if there is any improvement on one hundred—' He paused, but there was no improvement. A number of men looked at Gleber, as if they were not pleased with him, obviously he was bidding high, setting a price which they did not want to equal. There were murmurs near at hand, but Dias seemed sublimely unaware of any dissatisfaction, and Lozana 'booked' a thousand small saucepans for Gleber, and then took other orders. They were not so free this time. Dias encouraged the sales; it took ten minutes or more to dispose of five thousand small saucepans.

There were, it appeared, ten thousand large saucepans for disposal. Dias called for bids; half a dozen men looked round at Gleber, but he was sitting back and smiling happily; apparently he wanted no large saucepans.

It went on and on.

Gleber did more bidding than any of the others, but the murmurs against him faded. Apparently the two things he had most wanted were nails and small saucepans, and he allowed others to have a reasonable share of what was left.

The atmosphere was becoming thick, everyone seemed to be smoking, and there was no air. Palfrey eased his collar, feeling very warm, bemused, trying to make sense of what he was hearing.

After the tenth item, Dias raised his hand.

'Now, gentlemen,' began Dias, 'I would like—'

Across his words there came a buzzing sound, sharp but pitched on a low note; there was about it something of the urgency of an air-raid warning, but it was on one note, like the 'raiders passed' signal of a siren. It had an electrifying effect, except on Gleber, who was belching contentedly and not apologising.

'What is that?' he asked Palfrey.

'A bell of some kind,' Palfrey said.

A little man came in; he had a bald, egg-shaped head.

The door was shut and bolted behind him.

Every eye turned towards the little man as he hurried towards the platform. He disappeared behind the curtain, then came into sight. Dias and Lozana met him near the side of the platform.

'Thank you,' said Dias. 'Gentlemen, I have always assured you that we would never have any need to fear an untimely interruption at any of our meetings; there will *always,* in every instance, be an opportunity to make our escape. No matter how great an emergency there may appear to be, you will always have ample warning. I do not think there is immediate danger tonight, it is most unlikely, but—there is one amongst us who has no right here.'

# Chapter Twenty-Two

## Traitor in the Ranks

'Gentlemen, I *must* ask you to be silent,' said Dias, in an angry voice. 'I have an announcement to make. A request—you will gladly obey the request, I am sure of that. We will ask each one of you, please, to rise in your seats, each one of you *one at a time.* Those who recognise the guest who stands will, please, say so *at once,* for there is a stranger; we must first find out those who are not known among us, and then we will ask them to prove their identity. You see, it will cause no great trouble—and,' added Dias, in a silky voice, 'we shall know how to deal with the man who has no right here. Now, please, start from—there!'

He pointed towards the back of the room, on the opposite side from Palfrey.

Palfrey stared along the row, and could hardly see because Gleber's broad head was in his way. He counted desperately. Seven–eight–nine men were in the back row, it was likely that he would be the ninth to stand up.

The seventh man was vouched for.

'Herr Gleber, please,' said Dias, pointing.

Gleber pushed his chair back, and stood up.

*There was dead silence.*

It seemed to last for a long time. Gleber licked his lips and looked about him almost desperately; he glared down at Palfrey he prodded Palfrey's shoulder. Palfrey sat quite still, his heart thumping; he could feel Gleber trembling beside him.

'Herr Gleber will please stand at the side of the room,' said Dias, in a silky voice. 'His papers will be inspected. *Please,* Herr Gleber—'

Gleber was half-way to the door when he fired.

Palfrey tried to get up, failed, lay at full length and covered his head with his hands for protection, but peered towards the door. He saw the flame from the guns. Gleber was firing, the men were shooting back at him. A bullet went close to Palfrey, and Dias screamed from the platform:

'Do not shoot this way!'

Gleber was unhurt. He behaved like a madman as he reached the first attendant and flung him sideways. A second crumpled up on the floor, the third jumped at him, and Gleber smashed the butt of his gun against his head.

Gleber snatched at the bolts.

Palfrey got up, slowly, knowing that Dias had called out because the attendants' shots were liable to injure men in the body of the meeting, men who backed away at another call from Dias. For a moment it looked as if Gleber would have a chance to get out; he actually got the bolts back and

pulled open the door – and then Dias fired at him from the platform.

Gleber stiffened, and then crumpled up.

Silence fell upon the room.

The stewards were on their feet again. One of them was wounded in the shoulder, another had a flesh wound in the arm. Members of the meeting lifted Gleber, at Dias's instructions, and he was carried towards the front of the room. The party disappeared behind the curtains.

Dias climbed straight on to the stage.

'*Gentlemen!*' One had to admire the man, there was not a tremor in his voice, and he was in complete control of the situation. The men began to take their seats – and as Palfrey went to his he saw a slip of paper on the floor. He picked it up quickly, but did not put it in his pocket. It was one of the lists, it might be invaluable – *if* he got out of here alive.

Dias said: 'We shall meet again, perhaps here, perhaps elsewhere, at the first opportunity, gentlemen. There has been no alarm at all in the theatre, it will be safe to go out that way. You will exchange your tickets for the tokens in the usual way. *Good* night, gentlemen!'

# Chapter Twenty-Three

## Goods on the Market

Palfrey stopped playing with his hair, thrust his hands deep in his pockets, and regarded Bane with a faint smile.

'There's a lot you say you don't know,' he said. 'I don't know this and that, either, and the thing which is preoccupying me most at the moment is William K. Bane.'

'I told you I would play ball,' said Bane. 'I came straight here to tell you what had happened—I'm here, aren't I?'

'Did you recognise me at the meeting?'

'I wasn't sure of you. A word from me would have meant the same trouble for you as it did for Gleber, you can chalk that up to my credit.'

'Yes,' said Palfrey. 'But we're a bit mixed up, Bane. If you recognised me and didn't betray me, it might be a point in your favour. Not necessarily, but there would be a chance. You might be hand in glove with Dias working hard to make sure that I can't go too far. Mightn't you?'

'Surely,' said Bane, 'but I'm not.'

'And as you had your suspicions of me at the meeting, you naturally came straight here,' said Palfrey. 'You can't tell me what I don't know myself, so no harm can come of frankness. The policy would obviously pay.'

'You're some cynic,' said Bane.

'In this I'm a realist,' said Palfrey. 'The truth is that I don't know whether you can be trusted, and the realistic attitude is to assume that you can't.'

'That's up to you,' said Bane. 'I wanted to find out what Dias is doing. I can tell you a lot of things, Palfrey, that will surprise you.'

'Ah,' said Palfrey. 'I'm in a receptive mood. The first thing I would like to be surprised about is your reason for coming to Europe and working—ostensibly working, if you like—with a skate like Dias. You're a wealthy man, they tell me, one of the Wizards of Wall Street. This isn't exactly your cup of coffee. Why come in person?'

'I have business in Europe for the State Department,' said Bane. 'You can check that, I guess. I'm prepared to help you find the truth all I can; that's not talk, that's facts. Before you showed up at the meeting tonight I hadn't all that confidence in you, Palfrey. I've plenty now. The man that can get to that meeting and get away with a whole skin is good enough for me.'

'See here, Palfrey, this is what Dias is doing, as far as I can check it to date. He sells three or four cargoes of wheat, or maybe eggs, maybe fruit, maybe beef. He puts more on board those ships than there should be—he overloads them. It was the overloading which first made us suspicious of him—but we can talk about that later. He unloads, he has secret buyers, you saw a lot of them tonight. If his cargo is due in at Rotterdam, he sells to buyers within easy distance of Rotterdam. If it's due in Paris, he sells to the

nearest port agents. We don't yet know how many agents he has, how many shipments of food are coming in to the European Black Market—and,' went on Bane, 'we are going to find out, Palfrey.'

'We certainly should,' said Palfrey, mildly, and Bane snapped his fingers in annoyance.

'Well, Palfrey—are you with me?'

'Subject to this and that, yes. This and that,' added Palfrey, 'means chiefly whether you can produce the evidence that you are here for the State Department. As you said, that shouldn't be hard. Was Anderson semi-official?'

Bane laughed. 'He was not!'

'What part is he playing?'

'He controls a lot of food interests in Great Britain,' said Bane. 'Maybe you didn't know that. Dias wants him to put up some cargoes, I guess—and to finance other activities. It's a great pity Josh lost his temper, he might have got a lot from Dias.'

Stefan paused outside the door of Bane's hotel suite, and heard nothing.

He was expert, like Palfrey and the others, in forcing locks which were not too complicated; that of Bane's door was child's play. Stefan soon had it open, and stepped into a small, well-furnished sitting-room, the outer room of the suite. The door leading to the bathroom was open, but the room was in darkness. Another door was closed.

Stefan heard the murmur of voices. Silently he crept nearer, and heard a voice which he recognised immediately: *it was Dias.* Dias was saying: 'I do not believe you, Mr. Bane.'

Stefan looked about him, espied a telephone on a writing-table, went to it and lifted the receiver. He gave the number of van Doorn's house and waited, listening with one ear to the murmur of conversation in the next room, but he could only catch an occasional word; Bane did not sound pleased.

'Hallo, Sap,' said Stefan, as Palfrey came on the line. 'I'm at Bane's hotel. Dias was waiting for Bane. Tell Neil and Corny. I think we should be ready to act quickly.'

'Right-ho,' said Palfrey.

'Good-bye,' whispered Stefan. He replaced the receiver, and stood without moving after the soft *ting* of the bell sounded. The murmur of voices in the next room did not cease, and the door remained closed.

Stefan went towards it, and stood listening.

Dias was saying: 'You have been out, Mr. Bane. Why did you make a secret journey?'

Bane said: 'What I do is my business. You're asking for trouble, Dias.'

Stefan turned the handle of the door, then pushed the door open a little.

Dias said: 'Please, Mr. Bane. I do not want to be difficult. I have the greatest admiration for you, I want your support, but I must know where you have been. To see *Palfrey,* perhaps?'

Bane said: ‘It was.’

‘*Aaahhhh!*’ breathed Dias, ‘and was it by arrangement, Mr. Bane? Are you by any chance assisting him in his—ah—quest for radium?’

‘No,’ said Bane, ‘I’m assisting him in no way at all.’ He laughed. ‘Maybe he thinks I am, but you should know better.’

Stefan stood motionless by the door, afraid that Dias would see that it was open.

# Chapter Twenty-Four

## The Trickery of William K. Bane

'I do not think he is the easiest man to deceive,' purred Dias.

'Easy or not, I've hoodwinked him,' said Bane. 'Palfrey thinks you're after the radium and are doing some gun-running on the side.'

'Indeed,' said Dias. 'Did you discourage the suggestion that I would deal in anything so lethal?'

'I did not,' said Bane, who seemed supremely self-confident. 'I told him that his guess was as good as mine.'

'And what else?' asked Dias.

'That I had sunk a lot of money in your schemes,' said Bane, 'meaning the railroads and other development projects in South America, and I was afraid you were putting a big one across me. Palfrey thinks I'm checking on you.' He laughed again. 'I'm not fooling, Dias. And it's time you and I got down to cases. I've seen the strength of your hand tonight. I like the look of it.'

'I am *very* glad,' said Dias.

'You did more business in an hour than I expected you to do in a week,' said Bane. All you need for bigger business are bigger cargoes. You can't get those cargoes without more support among the United Nations, I guess—surely, I can now see why you are so anxious to be treated as a friend by the State Department. Maybe I can manage that.'

Dias said softly: 'For what consideration, my friend?'

'A quarter cut on profits,' Bane said.

'That is not unreasonable,' said Dias, and Stefan thought that he sounded relieved. 'I hope we can reach an understanding, Mr. Bane; I shall be able to tell you whether we can before long.'

'What's stopping us?' asked Bane.

'I want a little more information,' said Dias. 'I think it will be available very shortly. You will have no objection, I am sure, if I stay here for a short time?'

'Suit yourself,' said Bane.

Most men would have found it wearisome, would have shifted their weight from one leg to the other, but Stefan stood like a statue, not even turning his head. Twenty minutes had passed since he had spoken to Palfrey, and Palfrey would soon be here.

What was Dias waiting for?

Was Bane as confident as he sounded?

The silence was broken abruptly by the ringing of a telephone bell, the bell in the room where Stefan was standing. It had hardly started before he moved behind the door and stood with his back pressed against it, ready to go into action, but the door did not open any further. There was an extension telephone in the bedroom.

Dias answered the telephone, and Bane protested:

'That call's for me.'

'I do not think it is, my friend,' said Dias. He changed from English to Spanish, and Stefan had some difficulty in following what he said, but he did not say a great deal; he listened. There was a noticeable increase in the tension in the room. Bane's feet moved back, his hand disappeared; he was probably ready to get to his feet.

Dias spoke again, and replaced the receiver.

He stood up and moved within Stefan's line of vision.

'So, Mr. Bane, you *deceived* Palfrey? He thinks I am looking for the radium, with arms as a sideline. *Very* convincing! But, you see, I had a man listening to your conversation, I have had a man able to hear what is said in that house, and *he has reported the real conversation you had with Palfrey.*' There was a short, tense pause. Then, 'Juan, your gun!' said Dias.

Bane leapt to his feet.

Stefan flung open the door, sent it crashing back against the wall, saw Lozana swing round with the gun already in his hand, but pointing towards a corner, between Bane and Stefan. Stefan reached out, struck the gun-arm, and sent the gun flying to the floor. Bane was already at Dias's chair; Dias was half standing, but sank down when Bane thrust a hand at him. Lozana was backing away from Stefan, his eyes on the gun by the door.

Again the men fell silent. Lozana and Dias seemed dazed by the realisation that they had been outwitted.

Bane laughed. 'Thanks, boy!' he said, and laughed again.

Dias said: 'Bane, I warn you, if anything should happen to me, your life—'

'I'll look after my life,' said Bane, cheerfully. He grinned across at Stefan. 'I hoped Palfrey would have the sense to send someone after me, but I was beginning to think he trusted me too much. Sit down, Dias, you're going to remain sitting for a long time yet. And take your hand from your pocket!'

Dias said: 'I have warned you.'

'Oh, sure,' said Bane. 'I—'

He broke off, for there were sounds in the passage, footsteps, hushed voices, sounds which would probably not have been heard but for a thud when a man stumbled. Dias looked eagerly towards the door. Lozana made a furtive movement towards the gun. Stefan kicked it further away, and raised his clenched hand. Lozana stopped where he was.

The door from the passage opened.

Stefan spread out his fingers, thrust his hand against Lozana's chest and sent him sprawling backwards, then turned and looked into the outer room. There were de Morency and Charles. Charles rubbing his knee and looking rueful, de Morency hopeful.

'Trouble, my friend?' he called.

'Not serious trouble,' said Stefan, easily. 'I think we have turned the tables on Dias very well. You were quick. Where is Sap?'

'Downstairs,' said de Morency.

'I think he would like to come up here,' said Stefan. 'Charles, will you

go?'

'Okay,' said Charles.

He hurried along the passage, saw the chair against which he had stumbled still standing further from the wall than was safe, stooped down to move it out of his path – and as he did so a door next to Bane's opened, and a man came through. Charles caught a glimpse of him, saw his upraised hand, half-turned and opened his lips to cry out – and then felt a blow on the side of the head – painful and heavy. He went down without a murmur, the only sound the thud as his body hit the floor.

A girl joined the man.

'Watch,' he said to her. He turned and went to Bane's door, and stood outside it, listening intently. It was the Dutchman who had been with Dias and Lozana on the platform at the meeting. He still held the weapon with which he had knocked Charles out – a heavy bludgeon. He put his hand to his pocket and drew out an automatic – and then he pushed open the door. As he did so two more men appeared from the room from which he had come.

He stood aside.

'Softly,' he whispered.

They stepped through and crept silently across the room. The inner door was ajar, they could hear de Morency talking to Stefan. The gunmen stood on either side of the door, and the Dutchman slowly pushed it further open.

De Morency cried: 'Stefan, behind you!'

The door crashed back, and the Dutchman ran into the room straight at Stefan. The others followed him, their guns raised. For a moment only Stefan and the Dutchman were moving, and Stefan thrust out his hands. His reach was enormous. The Dutchman reeled back, as if he had come up against a solid wall. Lozana darted for the gun on the floor, Dias pushed Bane aside and heaved himself up from his chair.

Bane looked into the muzzle of an automatic, and stood quite still. De Morency made a move towards Dias, and one of the men at the door shot him, at a few yards' range. The bullet entered his chest. De Morency fell back, the blood rushing from his mouth. He tried to get his hand to his pocket for his gun, but failed. The Dutchman came at Stefan again, and this time ran into a punch which lifted him off his feet. As Stefan turned towards the gunmen, Dias rushed behind him and raced for the door.

Bullets went over Stefan's head as he ducked.

Lozana reached the door behind Dias, the two silent gunmen hesitated on the threshold, and Dias snapped:

'Shoot Bane—shoot Bane!'

Bane flung himself to the side of the room, behind the door, as two belated shots rang out. By then voices were raised in the nearby rooms, someone was banging on the wall in the next room. The gunmen withdrew as swiftly and silently as they had entered; Dias and Lozana raced along the passage with their heads down, trying to avoid recognition. At the end of the passage, looking down into the narrow hall alongside the stairs, was a

girl – Muriel.

She said, 'That way,' and pointed along a second passage, leading to the back of the hotel. Dias turned and raced along it, moving with remarkable speed for such a heavy man, but not trying to run silently. Lozana pegged along behind him, and the girl withdrew, disappeared into a room and closed the door. By then the whole floor was in uproar, doors were opening, men appeared in the passage and scared women peered from behind them. Two women were not so scared, and were actually the first to enter the passage. Everyone seemed to be talking at the same time.

Palfrey appeared on the landing, with a night-porter behind him, protesting volubly. Charles was on the stairs, dazed but conscious, Erikson and Bruton were in the hall. People were beginning to come down the stairs from the second floor, others appeared in the hall itself, there was a surging mass of excited people, all demanding to know what had happened.

He pushed his way towards Bane's room, afraid of what he would find. Charles tagged along behind, a rather embarrassed Charles, who disliked being the centre of such a scene.

As Palfrey went in he saw Stefan bending over de Morency in the inner room, and Bane standing at the telephone in the outer room, banging the receiver up and down. He looked across at Palfrey and said: 'It's your French friend, in a bad way. Hallo, there—give me the hospital and give it me quick!'

Palfrey joined Stefan.

He caught a glimpse of the big Dutchman, still huddled up on the floor.

De Morency was unconscious. Palfrey saw the blood on his shirt-front. Stefan had already padded the wound.

Palfrey felt his pulse, held his wrist for what seemed a long time, and then straightened up.

'I don't think we'll save him,' he said.

Stefan said: 'It was at such short range, there was no chance to avoid it.' Charles stared wide-eyed at de Morency. Palfrey went to the Dutchman on the floor, examined him, looked round and found Stefan staring at him gravely.

Palfrey said: 'You hit him, didn't you?'

'Yes.'

'It was just a little too hard,' said Palfrey, and pointed to the man's neck. It was bent in an odd position; the neck was broken.

There had been another interview with the Chief of Police, who remained friendly and helpful although he had been dragged out again in the middle of the night. Bane had told most of the story at first: how he had been set upon by ruffians, how Stefan had come to his rescue, how the others had attacked Stefan. Palfrey and Stefan had supported his story; for the time being it was much better that the police did not have an official complaint against Dias and Lozana. The dead Dutchman was not known to the police.

They walked to the front door, which Anna opened for them, and Charles

seemed to forget for a moment his distress and the horror of what had happened, *for Anna was smiling a welcome.* He looked at her curiously. Even Palfrey was startled at the change in her.

The men were eating toast and scrambled egg when Drusilla came down, fresh, bright-eyed, anxious for news. Charles watched her as Palfrey told her what had happened to de Morency, and he pushed his plate away from him, got up and hurried out of the room. Drusilla looked after him in startled surprise.

'I am probably quite wrong,' said Stefan, 'and yet I must admit that I am worried about Charles. I do not like his curious manner, he follows us about rather like a dog at heel, he shows a deep affection for Anna, perhaps *too* deep, for she is not beautiful. It may be pretence. If it were Drusilla, now!' He paused while he ate and drank, and then went on: 'Dias learned exactly what was said here to Bane.'

Palfrey put his knife and fork down.

'Everything,' said Stefan, 'Bane had told him a different story; I do not think that we need fear that Bane is against us, Sap, he did his best to mislead Dias. Then came a telephone call. It was someone who could, perhaps, speak Spanish – at least, Dias spoke Spanish to the speaker, but he may have used a different language from the caller's to try to baffle Bane, who could hear what he said. That does not greatly matter. What matters is that if Dias had not been told the truth, the shooting would not have started then. Bane had succeeded, I think, in quietening Dias's fears.'

'What did Dias say?' asked Palfrey.

'That he had someone who could overhear all that was said in the house,' said Stefan. 'Now he certainly *did* learn what was said here. Charles might have telephoned—or given a message to someone else. Was Charles in here all the time. Sap?'

# Chapter Twenty-Five

## Grave Doubts about Charles

'Yes,' said Palfrey, 'he was here all the time. I don't think he could have got out of bed and gone downstairs to the telephone without waking me. I hadn't been asleep for ten minutes before your call came, and he was fast asleep then.'

'What chance did he have on the way from here to the hotel?' asked Stefan.

'Some slight chance,' said Palfrey. 'He lost his way. He found us again just after Raoul and I had come into the hall. I sent him up with Raoul.'

'Yes, I know,' said Stefan. 'While with Raoul he was careless enough to kick against a chair. It might have given warning to the men who came and attacked us.'

Drusilla said: 'Someone *could* have been lurking outside.' 'Dias would not have been so sure that he would learn all that was said,' said Stefan, 'if it were because he had an eavesdropper outside the windows. And that eavesdropper would have been seen by the police. Don't you agree?'

'There's one rather significant thing, though. The old gardener lives here and sleeps in a small room by the kitchen,' said Palfrey. 'We hardly ever see him about. When he is seen, he isn't heard—he walks remarkably softly. You'll have noticed it. He did nothing at all for Anna when the couple who first came here attacked her. I thought it curious then. Anna convinced me that there was nothing surprising in it, he's supposed to be dull-witted, but she might be deceived by him.'

'Shall we question him?' asked Stefan, in a voice that suggested that Palfrey would not agree to the course.

'Not yet,' said Palfrey. 'Watch him, that's all. And watch Charles. No, I don't like it,' he said, and stifled a yawn. 'I'd better go to bed. So had you. Give us a call if there's any kind of alarm, 'Silla.'

He went upstairs to his room and found Charles sitting dejectedly on the side of the bed, looking at his reflection in the mirror.

'Hallo, old chap,' said Palfrey. 'Not in bed yet?' Charles said: 'It's the very devil, Sap! I've known almost from the start what you think about her, and yet—well, I can't help it! It's crazy, I know all about that, and yet I can't do anything about it. I've tried—*how* I've tried! I've followed Anna about because she reminds me of her, but—'

His voice broke. He kicked off his shoes, got up, and went to the window.

'Who, Charles?' Palfrey asked.

Charles swung round. '*Muriel!*'

Palfrey drew in his breath, but just saved himself from exclaiming in amazement.

Charles said: 'It's impossible for you to understand, I don't understand

myself, but in London when Muriel came into the room after—after I'd had such a basting, something happened to me. I know that you think she is one of the mob—perhaps she is, but it doesn't make any difference to what I *feel*. I suppose it would have been all right if I hadn't seen her with Bane the other day, using a different name. That seemed to prove that you were right. It's so—so incredible!' cried Charles. 'She matters to me, Palfrey. I—I can't think of anything else, most of the time I'm obsessed with it. I have to give myself a kick to wake up. I've been following you around like—like a lapdog, you must have thought I was as witless as a crab, but there it was. Anna—well, Anna *is* like her. Not in her appearance so much, although there is a likeness. It's her manner. She's so quiet. She looks as if she's carrying a devil of a burden, and—and—well, I don't see Anna walking about, I see Muriel.'

Palfrey said: 'What brought it to a head, Charles?'

Charles said: 'I saw her tonight. At the hotel. As I was going up with de Morency. That's what made me kick the chair. She was looking out of a room near Bane's. She closed the door pretty sharply when she saw me; I only just caught a glimpse of her. Then, when I was coming for you, as I turned round when that beggar went for me, I saw her again. She was coming out of the room. She is one of them, there isn't any doubt about that now.'

They slept until late afternoon.

There was roast beef for dinner; a special occasion, said Anna, and smiled serenely. Palfrey wondered whether it had been bought on the Black Market. The thing was beginning to haunt him. He said nothing of it to Anna, but afterwards went upstairs to van Doorn, who was sitting in an easy chair by the fireplace. By then it was dark, and there was only a dim table-lamp by which to read. The fire was of logs.

Van Doorn put down a heavy book.

'You are very welcome, Palfrey.' His voice was regaining its strength, he was a different man from the wreck who had been brought back to the house. 'Do you make much progress, my friend?'

'More than there appears, I hope,' said Palfrey.

'Do you expect to stay here long?'

'No,' said Palfrey. 'We'll soon be moving on.' He talked of various things, only a little of Dias; he discussed the condition of the masses of the people, and turned the subject unobtrusively towards food. From there to Black Marketing was a simple step.

Van Doorn did not seem as affected by it as Palfrey expected.

'Yes, of course there is an extensive Black Market, my friend. What else can you expect? For years we kept the food away from the Germans whenever we could, we built up a secondary market, encouraged by you. It was a brave thing to do, and certainly not a crime in those days. Now many people are operating it who have not the best interests of the country at heart, but can you be surprised that those who have money buy on it?'

‘I suppose not,’ said Palfrey.

‘It is not of alarming proportions in Holland,’ van Doorn said, with some satisfaction, ‘but it is large enough. I do not think there is any hope of stamping it out this winter. Next, perhaps, if we have a good season in Europe. You see, Palfrey,’ he went on, with quiet dignity, ‘we are now so much more dependent on good imports. With so much land lost, ruined for four or five years to come, we must depend on those imports, and there is bound to be some illegal activity.’ He smiled gently. ‘I see you condemn me, my friend, for not being more shocked. I do not consider myself an enemy of Holland, and yet—often I would have been on the point of starvation, I think perhaps I would have lost Anna, had I not bought on the Black Market. We still do,’ he added, simply. ‘I talk to you confidentially, as a friend.’

Palfrey said: ‘Yes, of course. Was Laander an operator?’

‘He would see that his friends were well supplied,’ said van Doorn, ‘but I do not believe that he would ever make a profit out of his friends.’

Palfrey said: ‘Does it affect the Government?’

‘I do not think the Government would condone it,’ said van Doorn, ‘but it exists, and the truth is that without it there would not be the supplies available that there are today.’ He stretched out his hand, took a box of cigars from the dressing-table, and said: ‘These, now, were bought on the Black Market; Anna had them here for me yesterday. Yours were lost—and I have never thanked you enough for them!’

‘I wish you’d smoked more of them,’ said Palfrey, absently. ‘No, no thanks. I’ll have a cigarette.’ He watched the Dutchman pierce the end of a half-Corona, and saw that it was a brand well known in England. Had they come from England? Was Bane right when he said that many English firms were operating illegally on the European market? If so, how?

‘You are still angry,’ said van Doorn.

‘Angry?’ said Palfrey. ‘Good lord, no! I just don’t agree that it’s necessary. Or good.’

‘You don’t live here,’ said van Doorn. ‘Of one thing I am sure, my friend. When you left England, knowing that you would not be sure how long you would be on the Continent, you brought ample supplies of food with you. Is that not so?’

‘Yes,’ said Palfrey.

Van Doorn shrugged his shoulders. ‘You see?’

‘I think I see,’ said Palfrey.

The talk depressed him. He did see, only too clearly. The Black Market had come to be accepted, it was respectable to buy on it, not a thing of shame, even for otherwise law-abiding people. There was no way of convincing even a man like van Doorn of the innate evil in it, because van Doorn had lived so long in a country where there would have been starvation for him and his family but for the Black Market.

He was glad when Drusilla called upstairs: ‘Telephone, Sap!’

Palfrey hurried downstairs, and Drusilla said: ‘It’s Bane.’

‘Hallo, State Department,’ said Palfrey, more brightly than he felt.

‘You must be feeling a heap better,’ said Bane, dryly. ‘I wonder if you will be for long. Dias has left Rotterdam.’

‘Are you sure?’ asked Palfrey, sharply.

‘Yes. He flew to Berlin this morning. He is there now.’

Palfrey said: ‘Where did you get your information?’

Bane laughed. ‘From the American Occupation authorities, and it’s reliable. What are you going to do about it?’

‘Go after him,’ said Palfrey.

‘That’s fine,’ said Bane. ‘I’ll come with you.’

‘I don’t expect to leave until tomorrow,’ said Palfrey.

‘Meaning you don’t want me in your party,’ said Bane, after a pause. ‘Please yourself, Palfrey. But I hope we shall work together, we’ve had trouble enough on our own. And I’m not forgetful, you know.’

‘Of what?’

‘The fact that Andromovitch saved me from a bullet,’ said Bane, laconically. ‘I wouldn’t be travelling to Berlin or any place if he hadn’t. I’ll be seeing you.’

He rang off.

Palfrey replaced the receiver, pulled at the short hair at the top of his head, tried unsuccessfully to wind it round his finger, and then drew his hand away sharply.

He was wondering whether Bane had got his information quite as simply as he said.

# Chapter Twenty-Six

## The Discomfiture of Dias

It was time, said Palfrey, that Erikson and Bruton had a joy-flight. They left that night for Berlin, on the same aircraft as Bane. Palfrey did not see them off, but went with Drusilla, Stefan and Charles to the British Consulate, and there put through a telephone call to Brett.

'Drusilla nearly came over,' said Palfrey, after exchanging greetings, 'but we hoped you could get the information for us without that. Have you had any luck?'

'Yes.' Brett's voice was crisp, almost brusque. 'Bane is what he says he is, but strictly unofficial. There are widespread Black Market operations, but we cannot investigate except in Occupied countries. Are you any nearer the radium?'

'No,' confessed Palfrey. He did not like admitting it but it was no time for half-truths.

'I think you'd be wise to concentrate on it,' said Brett.

There was little more. Palfrey rang off, rubbed his forehead, looked ruefully at the others and told them the gist of what the Marquis had said. Stefan pulled a wry face, Drusilla looked worried. The only one who was not greatly affected was Charles. Charles had obviously pulled himself together and was determined not to make a fool of himself again.

'I don't see that his approval makes all that difference, Sap. Why be down in the mouth about it?'

'That wasn't our friend Brett,' said Palfrey. 'That was the Marquis of Brett, very formal, very much the member of the Government. He wasn't disapproving, he was warning me as clearly as he could that there have been complaints about our goings-on. The Chief of Police is perhaps not so friendly as he makes out; he has been telling High Authority that we don't appear to be very interested in radium.'

'Well,' said Charles, '*are* we?'

Palfrey laughed, without much humour. 'I am,' he said. 'Well, we'd better get some sleep, we want to be off early in the morning.'

'To Berlin?' asked Charles.

'Yes. After radium and von Kriess, *not* after Dias,' said Palfrey.

He lit a cigarette, and said nothing more. Drusilla was subdued. Stefan, who knew Brett almost as well as his friends, knew that Palfrey had not misunderstood what Brett had said.

For the first few hours of the journey across Holland and Western Germany there was desolation on all sides. Villages had been abandoned completely, they were still wrecked and unlived-in; windows gaped, splintered doors hung from the doorways. Churches and houses were blasted and holed,

fields that had once been fruitful were overgrown, cattle seemed hardly to exist – it was a vista of destruction in itself enough to depress them.

They crossed the Lower Rhine at Wesel, over a bridge which was still being repaired. There were notices in French, English, Flemish, Dutch and German, warning heavy traffic that the bridge must not be used; an odd contrast to the time when the Rhine had been crossed, when the bridge had been shaken by the thunder of tanks and heavy guns, and had borne the weight of the liberating armies, as they passed into the heart of the Reich.

They came to Berlin.

Palfrey, Stefan and Drusilla had been in Berlin in 1944, they had seen something of the devastation caused by Allied bombing, but now, in the gathering darkness, they looked about them and saw, with stifled horror, the desolation which seemed to have reached its height – or its depth – in the first city of the Reich. No man could look upon it for the first time without a lump rising in his throat.

Palfrey said: 'Well, it was an ugly blot, anyway.'

'Where are we going?' asked Charles, looking at the controls of his jeep.

'The United Nations Club,' said Palfrey.

What could Dias do *here?* What could anyone do?

Was he right to feel this acute depression, to sense the physical horror of blasted Berlin? Would he have felt that horror so acutely had he not spent so much time in Rotterdam and learned what there was to learn? In his heart he knew that it was not so much what he saw but what he imagined that caused his horror. He imagined resentment, deep down, smouldering, dangerous, resentment not only in Germany but in Holland, in the other countries, in France – yes, it had been evident in France. Resentment perhaps against Fate, resentment which bred hatred, out of which came the spawn of future wars.

They were directed by two American military policemen to the United Nations Club, where they hoped to find Erikson and Bruton waiting for them. They pulled up outside, and Bruton came hurrying down the steps, jaunty, unimpressed by the ruin about him. In fact there was not so much just there. The broad highway was nearly empty of traffic, it was the beginning of the famous *autobahn* which led from Berlin to Cologne. Some buildings had escaped destruction, several had been repaired; like Bruton, they had a jaunty air, as if they were conscious of the fact that they were the first of many which would soon stand there, superior, privileged, aloof.

It was a curious impression, and Palfrey was amused by it – amused for the first time since they had left Rotterdam.

Bruton was in high spirits.

'You made good time,' he said. 'And you've come just in time to move again, Sap!'

'Where to?' asked Palfrey, quickly.

'Dias is in Sweden,' said Bruton. 'He was chased out of Berlin—boy, was he chased! They wouldn't let him stay more than one night, he went off protesting even when he climbed into the airplane. He doesn't like

Americans, English or Russians, because they all had a hand in it. No, sir, no one in Berlin has a kind word for His Excellency Señor Fernandez y Dias. It did me good, Sap, just to see his face when he left.'

Palfrey said, with great deliberation: 'It's done me good just to hear you talk for one minute. When did he go?'

'This morning. There were two airplanes for Stockholm,' added Bruton, 'and Neil got on the second. So did Bane. It looks as if we'll have to leave the luggage behind, and fly over.'

'Possibly,' said Palfrey, as they walked into the building. It was comfortably furnished and had a curious atmosphere combining that of a London club with that of a good hotel. American, Russian, French and English officers were sitting in the lounges, and there was a good display of flags of the three nations. 'Have you looked up von Kriess?'

'No,' said Bruton, 'except to make sure he's still around. And his wife—Anna said something about the Frau, didn't she?'

'Yes,' said Palfrey.

It was astonishing how his spirits had been lifted by the simple fact that Dias had not been allowed to stay in Berlin. Probably the depression because of the comparative failure of his mission had made him take the wrong view of the Marquis's brusque warning. 'Have we got rooms?'

'Have we got rooms!' said Bruton. 'Have we got the royal suite!' He led the way up a flight of wide stairs to the first floor, flung open a door and stood aside for them to enter. It was easy, in that luxury, to forget the scenes outside and *en route*. There were three rooms with communicating doors, a bathroom, and a long narrow lounge which ran the whole length of the suite; the furniture was superlatively comfortable. 'Why the honour I don't know—perhaps they've heard of you in Berlin, Sap.'

Palfrey laughed.

Yet there was something he could not properly understand.

He was not meant to understand it. Bruton's gleaming eyes told of secret knowledge, Bruton's insistence that they should get a bath and dress quickly was another indication. Palfrey had no desire to hurry, and twice while he was lying in the hot bath watching the curling eddies of steam, someone tapped peremptorily on the door. Bruton, undoubtedly. Palfrey stirred himself.

It was good to change into fresh clothes, but he did not like looking out of the window. Yet his spirits had soared; Dias *had* been given marching orders quickly. Palfrey knew now that the fear that had most affected him was that the United Nations were condoning Black Market.

Drusilla had allowed herself an afternoon gown, which would serve as a dinner-gown. It was black with white trimming, and she looked exceedingly well in it. It was good to see her out of suits, to see her taking extra care with her make-up. Palfrey kissed the nape of her neck.

'Why so bright-eyed?' he demanded. 'Has Corny told you this secret?'

'No, but he's sure it will please,' said Drusilla.

'How much longer?' called Bruton, from the door. 'Almost ready,' said

Drusilla. She turned to Palfrey. ‘Am I all right?’

‘All right!’ he groaned. ‘Why must I share you with others?

I feel romantic tonight. Good lord!’ he said, and shook his head, marvelling. ‘The inconsistency of the human race. Meaning me. Coming, Corny!’ he called, linked arms with Drusilla and led her to the door.

Splendour lay ahead of them!

While they had been out of the long front room it had been transformed. Gone were the easy chairs, no longer was it a place for indolent lounging. Down the centre was a long dining-table glittering with crystal, dark polished wood with snowy-white mats, silver which was so highly burnished that it reflected dazzling light. Chairs were arranged on both sides and one at either end. Even a red plush carpet was down, and by the door stood two waiters in formal dress, grave and yet excited men – nearly as excited as Bruton. In Bruton there was much of the eternal child, and now his eyes danced and he clapped his hands together. He took Drusilla’s arm and led her round the table, while Palfrey followed with a dazed look in his eyes. They made a complete tour of the table. Bowls of roses and carnations gave a glory of colour and scent. Finger-bowls stood by each plate and by one place was a small black box.

‘Well, how does it strike you?’ demanded Bruton, lighting a cigar and holding it at a jaunty angle. ‘Some reception for the Palfreys! It’s a pity there isn’t someone else more deserving, but you were the only people on the way here.’

‘Thanks,’ said Palfrey. ‘Certainly most undeserving, my half of the Palfreys.’ He looked at Drusilla’s shining eyes. ‘My turn,’ he added. ‘Well?’ After a long pause, Drusilla said: ‘I wish I had a different gown!’

‘I’ll give up!’ gasped Bruton, after a pause nearly as long. Palfrey squeezed Drusilla’s arm.

‘The right spirit,’ he said. ‘Splendour to match splendour, but you haven’t done so badly. Why all this, Corny?’ ‘You’ll see,’ said Bruton.

‘Don’t tell me that you’re going to bring Dias in to watch us gloating,’ said Palfrey, ‘and the talk of Sweden was all my eye.’

Bruton laughed. ‘Dias is out of the country, that’s certain. I can’t guarantee that all his boy friends are, but they won’t cause any trouble tonight, Sap.’

Palfrey was counting the places. ‘Eight—nine—ten—eleven—twelve,’ he said. ‘How many fair ones?’

‘That’s the one thing we fell down on,’ said Bruton; ‘Drusilla will be the only woman, but she can stand it for one evening.’

He raised his head; obviously he had been listening for someone’s approach. ‘Ah,’ he said, and sped to the door, which one of the waiters was opening.

Palfrey drew Drusilla back from the table to the side of the room. They were still holding hands. The waiters bowed. Bruton stepped into the passage and then returned, accompanied by two men, one squat, sturdy, powerful, the other taller, not so broad but powerful-looking. They were

high-ranking officers of the Red Army, and were in ceremonial dress. They were smiling broadly, and were obviously enjoying their share in the joke. The eternal children; Palfrey was enjoying himself hugely.

Bruton brought them forward, like a boy showing off his favourite relatives. He was suddenly formal. 'Mrs. Palfrey, allow me to present General Alexi Zukkor—Colonel Akim Chenov.'

There were bows, handshakes, laughter. General Zukkor was the short squat man. He had a broad face, a merry face, and he was certainly enjoying himself. Colonel Chenov was, perhaps, a little graver; he smiled more with his eyes than with his lips, but he smiled often. They made much of Drusilla, and told Palfrey that they had often heard of him and were delighted to meet him. They had a special message for him …

Years before, when Palfrey had been in Russia, he had met the Man of Steel, and from him came the special message to be remembered and to congratulate him on his more recent work, to express confidence that he would be equally successful with any further work he undertook.

Was there a deeper shade of meaning to the last part of the message, wondered Palfrey.

Bruton disappeared, and came back with a lank American, General Pitard, and a burly American, Colonel Mond, both of whom obviously knew the Russians well. The party grew more frolicsome and wine began to flow. They were talking and laughing when a little whippet of a man came in, English to the backbone, straight as a ramrod, a man who, to all appearances, had no chance at all of fraternising successfully with the officers of the Red Army. With him was a tall, fair-haired, youngish major, a 'typical' Englishman.

The whippet took General Zukkor to a corner and talked earnestly, then rejoined the main party and became its life and soul when Zukkor and Chenov would allow him. These men, all six of them, were old friends, and behaved as if they had known one another all their lives. All talked English – the Russians slowly and painstakingly over some words but fluently enough most of the time.

Stefan came in and drew up in surprise on the threshold. He was led forward by Bruton, still acting as host, and then saw Chenov and threw ceremony to the winds. The sight of the giant and the Colonel embracing each other ought to have been amusing but was not; obviously they *were* friends of a lifetime, as they could not talk quickly enough. Rarely had Palfrey seen Stefan so animated, so entirely happy.

Palfrey had forgotten completely the desolation outside.

Charles entered, missed a step, and looked round with almost fatuous surprise. He was led forward, looked dazed at first, was introduced, grabbed a whisky-and-soda, spluttered over it, and then said that he was jiggered. Bruton took him round again, and Charles seemed fascinated by the squat power of Zukkor.

Palfrey counted. Eleven were present; who would the twelfth prove to be?

Bruton, who missed nothing, hurried to the door and then stood aside.

The Marquis of Brett walked, smiling, into the room.

# Chapter Twenty-Seven

## New Orders

They were sitting round the table, with only wines and salted nuts and fruit in front of them. The ash-trays were filled to over-flowing, the room was almost uncomfortably warm – so warm that only the whippet still had his coat buttoned, and General Pitard looked ready to take off his. They had been talking one against the other for nearly two hours, and Palfrey and Drusilla had listened most of the time, making little comment, understanding at last what had prompted this occasion. Zukkor had meant what he said, but there was something else. The dinner was over; it had been for the Palfreys and Stefan, but this conference was of a different kind. Laughter had faded, grimness replaced it.

Brett had started the ball rolling.

For a long time, he said, it had been known that vast Black Market operations were being organised and encouraged throughout Europe, supplies on an unprecedented scale were reaching the illegal markets. Not only were the towns and cities supplied by the produce from the surrounding countryside, but shiploads and parts of trainloads throughout Europe had gone to the Black Markets, and the problem had grown in extent because among all the authorities there were leakages and active sympathisers. English, American, and Russian renegades turned a blind eye to what was going on. The immensity of the problem had not at first been understood; only in recent weeks had it become clear that shiploads of goods from abroad were being loaded on to lorries and trains at the docks, and unloaded in secret places. False papers, false shipping bills, false transport authorisations, had been forged; it was on a scale so large that there were genuine fears that it could not be stopped for a long time, it was so difficult to distinguish genuine authority from false. What was worse, shortages in the legal markets were getting more marked and nearing danger-point.

There were large Black Market operations in Berlin and other German cities, Zukkor said, taking up the story, but nothing like so extensive as there were in the liberated countries, obviously because Allied control made operations difficult. But on the fringes of Germany it was nearly as bad as elsewhere, and it had became a matter for the Army of Occupation.

Pitard said that the American, William K. Bane, had been approached to finance some of the illegal shiploads; that had been the first indication of the real scale of the organisation. He had taken the story to the State Department. He had been approached first by a man called Lozana, then by Dias, and in consultation with the State Department he had agreed to show interest, so as to find the root of the trouble. With him had been the Englishman, Josh Anderson, but Anderson had at first been inclined to take

his profit out of the trade. He had withdrawn only when he had discovered the full extent of it, and the evil it was causing, and he had then been smitten, said Pitard, with a mysterious illness. He was now lying in Rotterdam seriously ill. Bane was still working, as Palfrey knew, and had flown that day to Stockholm, whither Dias had gone.

Palfrey had asked, speaking for the first time: 'Why send Dias out of the country? You had him so that he couldn't get away.'

Zukkor, Pitard and the whippet had all begun to answer at once, then given way to Brett. Palfrey might probably guess the reason. Dias was one of the organisers, but so far it had been impossible to be sure who worked with him. Some shipping companies were involved, English and American, South American and, probably, Dutch and French, certainly Spanish. The issue was a momentous one. If the affair were handled badly it might cause bad blood among the nations. The leaders of the nations understood that private individuals were responsible, but if it became public news, then the countries from which the chief operators came would become unpopular – Brett said that he put it mildly. Distrust and suspicion would be rife. It was hoped that the names of all the people involved would be forthcoming, and that steps could be taken to put a stop to their activities at one and the same time. It was useless to close up one leakage if there were a dozen others still open. If steps were taken too quickly, it would be disastrous, for publicity could not be avoided and the trade would still go on. It was all or nothing, said Brett, and the committee which had been set up at San Francisco to investigate the workings of the Black Market in Europe believed that there was a chance of indicting every individual concerned, and of bringing the infamous business to a complete stop.

That was the gist of it.

Much more would follow, Palfrey knew.

Only Brett remained, in the early hours of the morning, with the Palfreys, Stefan, Charles and Bruton. All of them were tired out, and Brett said that it would be folly to talk further that night. He had a room opposite the suite.

They went to bed without further ado, and Palfrey and Drusilla were so tired that they said very little. They slept deeply, refreshingly, until morning.

When they woke up rain was splashing against the windows, and Berlin was covered with a drab grey pall of low cloud which kept visibility down to a few hundred yards. That, said Palfrey, was no one's loss. They breakfasted on their own, and then met Brett and Stefan in the large room. Charles was still asleep, Bruton was up and had gone out. Bruton already knew much of what the Marquis could tell the others.

Palfrey said: 'First and foremost, Marquis, why dampen my spirits on the telephone? You cast me lower than I've been for many a long day.'

'I was afraid that I would,' said Brett, 'but over the telephone it was difficult.'

'We had a private line, surely,' objected Palfrey.

Brett said: ‘Sap, we can’t be sure of *anyone.* There may be leakages in our Embassies, there may be leakages in London. By leakages I mean informers ready to sell to Dias and his men information about the steps which we are taking against them. When you telephoned, Bane had disclosed himself to Dias, so there was no danger in confirming what he was doing, but I had to make it *seem* clear that you were not to work in the same business. The radium hunt was a godsend.’

‘Hum, yes,’ said Palfrey. ‘You knew plenty about this before we left London, didn’t you?’

‘Of course,’ said Brett, ‘and wanted you to work on it. But I knew you would, in fact, soon be doing so, for we knew that Dias was the man we were after in the first instance. By coming to you Dias proved that he thought your talk of radium was a blind, he was afraid that we had put you and the men of Z.5 after him. It was much better, at that stage, that he shouldn’t know, and better that you should find out what you were after as you went along.’

‘Need you have kept it from us?’ asked Drusilla.

Brett looked at her with a quizzical smile.

‘’Silla, my dear, you’ve been wonderfully good and you’ve never prevented Sap from starting off on these ventures, but you had persuaded him to settle down in London. If I had first approached you about Black Market you would probably have blamed me for unsettling Sap. I knew that he was unsettled, but was determined not to aggravate that. When van Doorn came the floodgates burst open. I had to decide whether, at that stage, it would serve any useful purpose if I told you more. I didn’t think it would. There was no danger of your taking your work too lightly, and there was a chance of getting the opinion of men who had no prior knowledge and who would report on the situation as it really was. Isn’t that reasonable?’

‘I suppose so,’ said Drusilla.

‘Yet you had a warning,’ said Brett, still smiling. ‘Approval from Moscow, Paris and Washington was one thing: letting de Morency, Erikson and Bruton, as well as Stefan, come with you was a different matter.’

‘And you disappeared, to avoid importunate questions,’ said Palfrey with an air of reproof. ‘It’s hard. We would have been much better armed had we known all about it.’

‘I don’t agree with you,’ said Brett. ‘You might have struck an entirely different line. As it was, the two lines converged, and directly you were in contact with Bane I knew that you would probably force him to explain what he’s doing. Isn’t that right?’

‘I suppose so,’ said Palfrey, in his turn. ‘All forgiven. Except—’ He toyed with his hair, and looked at the Marquis.

‘*Doesn’t* Dias know anything about the radium?’

‘I shall be surprised if he doesn’t,’ said the Marquis. ‘I shall be equally surprised, if, before you’ve finished, you don’t find that the Black Market problem and the missing radium problem are closely connected.’

‘Reasons, please,’ said Palfrey.

‘Because Dias is undoubtedly interested in both,’ said the Marquis. ‘You’ve proved that to your own satisfaction,haven’t you?’

‘Unfortunately, no,’ said Palfrey. ‘As I see it now, Dias might have been convinced that I was really after the Black Market, might consider the talk of radium a blind. But I suppose it doesn’t greatly matter, we can do both jobs. If the worst comes to the worst, we’ll finish one and then start the other. I take it,’ he added, ‘that we are now formally and officially working on the Black Market operations?’

‘Yes,’ said Brett. ‘With this strong caution: in Sweden, you must appear as private individuals. If you need help there you can get it from Neilsen, of 36 Bikka Street, Haga. There is another thing: Charles Lumsden appears to be behaving queerly. Watch him very closely, Sap. He *might* be deeper than you think.’

‘We know,’ said Palfrey. At heart he was not satisfied, but he did not say so. He did ask: ‘Do you know who Gleber was—the Dutchman who pretended to be a German?’

‘A Dutch secret agent—a brave man but, I’m afraid, a bad agent,’ said Brett. ‘Of course all countries are working on the problem. Sweden hasn’t a Black Market of her own, but some supplies come from there. Zukkor is well known in Stockholm, and has been able to start some inquiries. If you do run into trouble there, and Neilsen can’t help, try to get in touch with Zukkor.’

‘We will,’ murmured Palfrey. ‘You didn’t come here only to see us, did you?’

‘I had other work in Berlin,’ said the Marquis, ‘and at the same time I have been able to get a full report on Black Market operations in Germany. As you were told last night, they are widespread, but not on anything like the scale of those in the other countries. Near the frontier, where goods can be slipped across at night, they present a bigger problem, but I think we can safely leave Germany to the Occupying Authorities—they’re in no doubt as to the need for quick, decisive action.’

‘So far, so good,’ said Palfrey, ‘but there’s still something that hasn’t seeped through to the grey matter.’

‘What?’ asked Brett.

‘I don’t quite know,’ said Palfrey, and looked across at Stefan. ‘Haven’t you the same feeling?’

‘I have been puzzled by one thing more than any other,’ said Stefan, ‘and that is the Marquis’s belief that the quest for radium and the other activities are connected. And I wonder,’ he added, with a faint smile, ‘whether there could be any more direct evidence about that, Marquis?’

‘Such as?’ asked Brett, who gave the impression that Stefan had scored a bull.

‘Who do you *think* first began this Black Market?’ asked Stefan.

Drusilla said suddenly: ‘Of course!’

Palfrey looked at her invitingly, Stefan hugged his knees.

‘Of course what?’ inquired the Marquis.

‘What first started it?’ said Drusilla, with some excitement. ‘*Who* first started it? Sap, Dias was a friend of the Nazis, we’ve had every evidence of that.’

‘Well done, ’Silla,’ murmured the Marquis.

Palfrey said blankly: ‘*Am* I really as dull-witted as that?’

‘If you have not seen what Drusilla means, then you are,’ declared Stefan, ‘but I think you understand.’ He looked now at the Marquis, on whom all eyes were turned; everyone was thinking of the same thing, and waiting on him to confirm it.

Stefan went on: ‘Is the Black Market Nazi-inspired? Like the theft of the radium? Is it part of their attempt to keep Europe troubled, to prevent the unity of nations, to ensure the failure of the United Nations, to set them quarrelling among themselves, starting among the smaller nations?’

Brett said: ‘I’m afraid it is.’

# Chapter Twenty-Eight

## The Reappearance of 'Muriel'

'And there we have it,' said Palfrey, 'or so they say.'

'Aren't you convinced?' asked Drusilla.

'I am not,' said Palfrey.

'I think you're being awkward for the sake of it,' declared Bruton.

'Sap is never awkward for the sake of it,' declared Stefan. 'Can we help, Sap?'

'I don't know,' said Palfrey. 'There is something we haven't seen properly. I don't know what. We're looking in to a mist. It was not right and proper that we should be kept in the dark from the beginning. The Marquis put up a fair case, but no more. Each one of us could have been trusted with the facts, and relied on to make it look as if we were after radium. Charles, perhaps, was the one exception—sorry, Charles,' he added with an apologetic smile, 'I mean from the official standpoint. You were an unknown quantity. But we could have kept it from you, the radium story would have been good enough cover.'

'Anything would be good enough for me,' said Charles, without bitterness. 'I'm odd man out, and don't I know it!'

'I have a firm conviction that we shall be very glad of you before we're through with this,' said Palfrey, and looked at him steadily. 'There's one particular thing you may be able to do, and which none of the rest of us could. We'll come to that later. The immediate and most important problem is: *why* were we kept in the dark? The Marquis can talk until he's blue in the face, but he won't convince me that it was necessary—on the grounds that he's given us so far, at all events.'

'Will it help *to* worry about it?' asked Drusilla. 'We know where we are now.'

'That's the problem—do we?' asked Palfrey.

He was inclined to agree, however, that Drusilla was right – it was not a thing for them to worry about now. Yet it was on his mind all the time, nagging at him, refusing to leave him alone. It had started when Brett had gone, and they had seen him off at the Tempelhof Aerodrome, with a splendid company of the Allied Nations in the official send-off.

He had left the previous afternoon.

It was now early morning, and they were not yet *en route* for Stockholm. Word had come through from Erikson that Dias was not exactly welcome in Stockholm, and it seemed likely that he would soon leave there. The others did not want to make the journey for nothing. Erikson was expected on the telephone at any moment. Meanwhile they sat about the big front room, now back to its original state and being used properly, for Palfrey was lounging back in an easy chair, and Drusilla was lying on a couch.

Outside it was still raining, but the mists had cleared.

Stefan said: 'Corny, I feel like walking. Who else is coming? Drusilla, leave your difficult husband and come with us.'

'Who said I wanted to go out?' demanded Bruton.

'I did,' said Stefan.

It was not Stefan's habit to break up the party without a good reason, and the reason was obvious to Palfrey and Drusilla, and became obvious to Bruton. Since Palfrey had spoken to Charles, Charles had been sitting in a brown study, obviously aching to be told what Palfrey thought he could do. Palfrey would have enlarged upon that then had he wanted the others to hear. As he did not, Stefan decided to give him an opportunity of being with Charles for half an hour.

'Coming, Charles?' asked Drusilla.

'Er—no, no, thanks,' said Charles, and showed almost indecent pleasure that they were going.

Palfrey sat back, pulling at his hair.

'I say. Sap,' said Charles, when the others had gone, 'were you pulling my leg, or is there something I can do?'

'Yes,' said Palfrey. 'Much. If you can stand up to it.'

'I think I can,' said Charles.

'So do I,' said Palfrey, 'but it will be a big test. It concerns Muriel.'

'Oh,' said Charles, and stiffened.

'There isn't much doubt that Muriel thinks she convinced you of her innocence,' said Palfrey, 'and equally there's little doubt that, by the enemy, you're looked on as the weak link in our chain. They will undoubtedly try to find out what we're doing. The most likely way is through you—*via* Muriel.'

'Good lord!' said Charles.

'I don't think that's so surprising,' said Palfrey. 'They almost certainly know that we're in Berlin. It wouldn't surprise me if they know about the conferences. Brett made it clear that there are serious leakages of information in the most unexpected places. My own opinion is that Muriel is probably in Berlin.'

'Would she be allowed to stay?'

'In Rotterdam she was supposed to be an American,' said Palfrey. 'And as faked passports and permit *visas* are being used fairly widely, I think she could justify her presence without much trouble. She's been working on Bane, but there isn't much chance that she had any success. I think she'll have another shot at you.'

'And if she does, what then?' asked Charles.

'You must have a story for her,' said Palfrey, 'a convincing story, with just enough of the truth to make it really plausible. If we invent such a story, will you give it a trial?'

'Like a shot,' said Charles.

'Knowing that if you're caught out it will undoubtedly mean curtains,' said Palfrey.

'Yes,' said Charles. 'I want to work my passage.'

‘Good man!’ said Palfrey, briskly. ‘When the others get back we’ll go into a huddle about it. I wanted you to have the chance of refusing without an audience, but’ – he laughed – ‘I didn’t think there was much danger of a refusal.’

‘If I get the chance,’ said Charles, soberly, ‘I’ll see it through.’

‘Good!’ said Palfrey. ‘And now I’m going out, I must see von Kriess.’

He went alone, but he was followed by two American security officers. In Berlin as well as in the other big cities there were still terrorists who tried to create confusion. Their numbers were small and their successes few, but Palfrey was glad that he had the two men behind him.

Von Kriess lived in the Lieberplatz, near a hospital which was one of the few places which had escaped the worst ravages of aeriel bombardment. Palfrey was deep in thought, and gave little attention to what was going on around him. He reached the house, which was one of a short terrace, and rang the bell. He had to wait for some time. He rang again, and an old man admitted him, a grumbling old man who asked his name as if he thought that callers should not be permitted, repeated it, and led the way, still muttering under his breath, to a waiting room. Herr von Kriess was engaged, he would probably not be able to see Herr Doktor Palfrey. Palfrey found it strange to be using his own name in Berlin, stranger to hear ‘Herr von Kriess’ instead of ‘Herr Oberst,’ as it would have been but a little while before.

He entered the waiting-room, and a woman sitting in one corner put down a magazine. It was Muriel.

She was wearing a Persian lamb coat with a small fez-shaped hat of the same fur, and she looked demure and delightful. Palfrey had little doubt that she wanted to create the impression that this was a chance meeting. He did not think it was. He felt sure that she had been in the house, that he had been seen approaching, and that she had taken up her position in order to create the greatest element of surprise.

She smiled up at him.

Palfrey said: ‘Hallo, Fräulein!’

She laughed. ‘You know better than that, Dr. Palfrey.’

‘I thought I was seeing visions,’ said Palfrey. ‘Miss Corliss, isn’t it? A friend of my friend William K. Bane. Astonishingly small world, don’t you think?’ Gravely, he shook hands. ‘Is William K. with the doctor?’

‘I think he has left Berlin,’ said Muriel.

‘Oh. The man does move so fast,’said Palfrey, aggrievedly, ‘one can never be sure whether he’s here or there. Has he gone far?’

‘He didn’t confide in me,’ said Muriel.

‘Well, well!’ said Palfrey. ‘Disappointing. I hoped you could tell me where to find him. I did hear that he was coming to see von Kriess, and I hope to get news from von Kriess. Do you think there is much hope?’

‘I really don’t know,’ said Muriel.

‘Pity,’ said Palfrey, ‘but there it is, one can’t expect too much.’ He

beamed. ‘How is His Excellency?’

‘Which one?’ asked Muriel, and added: ‘I thought they had stopped using titles in Germany now.’

‘In Germany, yes,’ said Palfrey. ‘I was thinking of Fernandez y Dias. Isn’t he a friend of yours?’

‘I think you must be confusing me with someone else,’ said Muriel. ‘Wasn’t Dias the man who often saw William K. in Rotterdam?’ Her lips curled. ‘That fat greasy South American.’

‘Yes,’ said Palfrey. ‘Not a nice South American, either; I wouldn’t get friendly with him, if I were you.’

‘I won’t any more than I can help,’ said Muriel. She stopped smiling, and her voice was low-pitched, almost appealing. ‘Dr. Palfrey, I came here hoping to meet you. You know how I once helped your friend Lumsden. I want to help again. If you will give me a chance, I think I can prove to you that—’

‘You’re really on our side,’ said Palfrey, sceptically.

‘Yes.’

‘Dear me!’ said Palfrey. ‘We shall have to go into this. You helped Charles Lumsden into the river at Putney, you helped Bane into a queer spot with Dias, and—’

He broke off, and swung round towards the door, for from the passage there came a high-pitched cry of horror and alarm.

There followed running footsteps, a deeper voice, a woman’s voice raised calling upon God. Palfrey reached the door and flung it open. The girl moved almost as quickly, and was behind him in the passage. A door further along was open and the old man was disappearing through it. The woman’s cries were coming from there. Palfrey strode to the doorway, looked over the old man’s head, and saw von Kriess lying across his desk, with a knife in his back. A little dumpy woman was standing by him, clutching at his hand and hugging it to her, calling his name aloud; but von Kriess did not move. The window wide open,and beyond it was a great expanse of rubble, where the murderer had doubtless made good his escape.

‘What’s happened?’ Muriel asked, in a hushed voice.

‘What I should have expected,’ Palfrey said, savagely, and turned to face her, his eyes glittering. ‘If you’ve had a hand in this, my black angel, I’ll never rest until you’re hanged.’

She said: ‘You must be mad!’

‘Mad!’ said Palfrey. He laughed bitterly, and turned away from her, looking at von Kriess, seeing that he was dead.

He did not interfere with Frau von Kriess, but spoke sharply to the old man, who was standing and staring with his mouth agape.

‘Telephone the civil police,’ he said, ‘at once!’

The old man started, looked at him as if in defiance, then changed his mind and moved to the telephone, which was on the corner of the desk. He talked above the woman’s low cries, which were getting quieter. She was no longer pressing the dead man’s hand close to her bosom, but held it lightly,

with a tenseness that suggested she did not want to let him go; she was afraid of losing touch with him.

Muriel went to her side.

Palfrey knew that the girl was clever, knew from Charles how well she could affect sympathy, and yet he was surprised at the gentle way she talked, and then led Frau von Kriess out of the room. She had a soothing effect even on Palfrey, who was bitterly angry with himself, for he thought that he could have prevented this thing from happening.

That was not quite true.

The Marquis knew that von Kriess was involved, so did the others. The man should have been watched.

Thinking like that was pointless.

Palfrey examined the wound. A single thrust to the heart, from behind, had killed von Kriess instantaneously; at least he had not suffered. He had not been dead long. Palfrey did not think it would be easy to find the murderer from clues left in that room. It was like the death of Laander, swift and sudden, a swoop out of the blue.

Palfrey went outside, called the American M.P.s and told them what had happened. One came into the house, the other went to report. Palfrey returned, looking from room to room for Muriel and Frau von Kriess. He found them on the first floor, in a bedroom, and there was a pleasant smell of eau-de-Cologne. Muriel was sitting by the side of the bed, Frau von Kriess was leaning back on the pillows, with her eyes closed. Muriel had flung a blanket over her, for the woman was shivering from the shock.

'Do you know the house?' Palfrey asked.

'No,' said Muriel.

'Find the old man, please,' said Palfrey. 'Get hot-water bottles and the usual things for shock. Hurry, please.'

He thought she would tell him to go himself, but she got up and went out. Palfrey took her place, lifted Frau von Kriess, pulled back all the blankets and sheet and put the woman right into bed, with all the bedclothes piled on top of her. She was shivering-uncontrollably, and her teeth were chattering. Palfrey did not speak as he stood there smoothing her forehead, his hand on her wrist. Muriel and the old man brought in more bedclothes and a stone hot-water bottle.

There were voices downstairs.

Palfrey went to the head of the stairs and called the remaining American, who came up promptly.

'I want you to stay with Frau von Kriess,' said Palfrey. 'She is not to be left with the girl in there, nor with the old man. I'll send word, and you'll have relief before long.'

'That's okay,' said the security man, laconically.

'Thanks,' said Palfrey.

He went downstairs, but no one seemed interested in him. German police were busy with photographs and finger-print powder, working quietly and efficiently; to give them their due, they were always efficient. So was Dias!

Von Kriess had died at Dias's instigation; there was no reasonable doubt of that. Von Kriess, Laander, Garon, Midaut, de Morency – the tally was increasing. For the first time since the beginning of the affair Palfrey felt hopeless; he had set much store on von Kriess, *and* on his wife.

Muriel's palpable trick to win his confidence enraged him.

He telephoned for Stefan, who came at once.

Upstairs, Frau von Kriess had quieted, and Palfrey ordered coffee for her. Muriel was still sitting by her side, the perfect nurse. She had taken off her hat and coat; beneath it she wore a well-cut tartan suit. Palfrey no longer seemed to impress her, but she looked with unfeigned admiration at Stefan.

Palfrey said: 'What were you doing here?'

'I've told you,' said Muriel.

'I don't believe you.'

'I can't make you,' Muriel said, coldly.

Palfrey deliberated for some time, while she stared at him boldly. To judge only from appearances, she was likeable and she sounded sincere, but he could not judge from appearances. What he had to do was to make up his mind whether to assume that she had nothing to do with the murder, and let her go – as the civil police would doubtless do, for von Kriess had been killed while he and Muriel had been sitting together in the waiting-room; she had not used that knife.

He could arrange for the Allied Security Police to detain her, but he doubted whether that would get the desired results. The girl knew a great deal, she was fighting hard in her own way against them, and he was sure that it would not be long before she tried again, through Charles. Charles was the right man to tackle her; believing him weak, she would probably betray herself. He decided to take no action.

While he was being questioned, with great respect, for the civil police had been told that he was a man of influence, two middle-aged German women arrived, alarmed and tearful. They had been summoned by the old man, and were relatives of von Kriess.

Muriel let them take her place in the woman's room, and as she came downstairs Palfrey was being wished a polite good day by the police.

'Your turn,' he said, and she looked at him angrily.

She was questioned for ten minutes, then came out and found Palfrey and Stefan waiting for her in the hall. She seemed relieved. She put on her hat and coat, using a small mirror in a hall-stand as she did so, without looking at them. She had given up all attempts to disarm him. When she had the hat on at the right angle, she said:

'I am afraid you are *quite* mad, Dr. Palfrey.'

'Oh, I am,' said Palfrey. 'No one but a madman would let you go. Tell Dias I shall be with him soon.'

She swung round. I*—do—not—know—Dias!*' she flung at him, and stalked past an astonished policeman into the street.

Stefan followed her.

A doctor came, saw Frau von Kriess and, when he came downstairs, told

Palfrey impressively what a great shock she had endured; she must not, he said, be disturbed for at least twenty-four hours. The doctor went off and Palfrey went upstairs to see for himself. The woman was just conscious and was suffering from another trembling fit.

'Twenty-four hours it is,' murmured Palfrey, glumly. 'I hope there's no news of Dias before I can talk to her, I shan't know what to do first.'

There was no news of Dias.

That was exasperating. Worse, Frau von Kriess reacted badly; the shock had gone deep, and Palfrey knew that she would need forty-eight hours to recover enough to be questioned. He was haunted by Anna's assurance that von Kriess had said that his wife knew a great deal, and by his own dissatisfaction. Nothing had gone as might have been expected; the secrecy in London seemed, even now, to have been unnecessary and melodramatic, as if he and the others could not have been trusted with the information. Bane's part puzzled him, and nothing more was heard from Muriel. Stefan had followed her to an hotel, but had not lingered.

Palfrey was, he told Drusilla, putting his feet all over the place and never in the right spot.

He saw Frau von Kriess on the second day.

She was very much better, and sitting up in her bedroom. Her relatives fussed about, scolded Palfrey for calling, begged him not to worry poor Bertha too much. Palfrey promised, asked a few preliminary questions – and released a torrent of pent-up emotion. Yes, she knew that her husband had been in danger; it was the Nazis – always the Nazis! He had opposed them too often. In Rotterdam he had been in great disfavour, in fact he had been sent to Holland because he had offended the Nazis. This was vengeance, she had no doubt at all.

Yes, he *had* received unexpected visitors; she well remembered van Doorn's visit, but she did not know what it had been about. Her husband had never confided in her, he had said that it was better for a woman not to know everything in these dangerous days. She knew what he meant, of course. Once she had been interviewed by the Gestapo, only highly placed friends had arranged for her to be saved from prison. The Gestapo had wanted to know what her husband did when he was not working; his loyalty had been suspect from the beginning; that was all she could say, his loyalty had been suspect. She had known that he hated the *régime,* but he had never admitted it to her, she had judged only from his actions. And now they had revenged themselves, and he was dead …

Palfrey could get nothing more from her, and felt convinced that she knew nothing more.

Had Anna van Doorn lied to Him? Or had she been guessing? Or – and Palfrey thought that this was the more likely explanation – had she believed that Frau von Kriess could tell him of her husband's long-lived hostility to the Nazi *régime?* Was that the vital clue?

He went back to the Club, and had not been there for long before a Russian attendant, speaking English with a broad American accent, called

him to the telephone. Stefan, Drusill and Charles were out, for the day was warm, and they were all feeling the need for exercise. This inaction in Berlin was the most trying feature of the quest, so far.

'*Sap!*' He heard's Charles's voice, pitched on a low key, obviously urgent. 'Sap, I've met Muriel, we've fixed a date for this evening, and are going straight on from here. All right?'

'Good man!' said Palfrey.

'Any special instructions?' Charles's conspiratorial whisper made Palfrey smile.

'No,' said Palfrey. 'Use your own judgment.'

'Then I'll get off,' said Charles. 'Cheer-ho!'

Palfrey put up the receiver, strolled away from the telephone booth and, feeling depressed by his own company, sat down in the lounge-hall and listened to the chatter of conversation. The conversation pleased him because English, American, Russian and French voices were all raised, and the basic language was English, although there were variations which were amusing in themselves. He found himself drowsing, wished he knew which way Drusilla had gone – and suddenly found a man shaking his shoulder vigorously.

'Oh, hallo!' said Palfrey, sitting up and blinking.

The telephone, please,' said an English orderly.

'Oh, thanks,' said Palfrey. He opened his eyes wide, astonished that he had actually fallen asleep, hurried to the booth and was asked to hold on. It was a call from long distance, from Stockholm.

News from Erikson at last! Which part of the continent had Dias chosen to visit this time? wondered Palfrey. It was crazy that the man had such freedom of movement; there *was* something radically wrong, and he could not place it.

'Sap?' Erikson's voice, sounding very faint, came on the wires.

'Hallo, Neil!' said Palfrey, heartily. 'Where are you?'

'At the *Splendor Hotel,*' said Erikson.

'What news?' asked Palfrey.

'Just a moment,' said Erikson – and that seemed a curious thing to say. 'Just a moment, Sap. I—Listen, listen hard, I won't have long. Knudsen—'

Palfrey heard nothing more, not even a gasp – just silence, as if Erikson had been cut off. He did not come on again. Palfrey put through a call to the *Splendor* at once, by his urgency won priority, inquired, and was told by a girl who sounded composed: 'I am sorry, sir, Mr. Erikson was taken ill while telephoning, and he is dead. I am sorry, sir.'

# Chapter Twenty-Nine

## Otto Knudsen of Stockholm

Palfrey and Bruton reached Stockholm that night, after dark.

There was no difficulty in tracing Erikson's movements.

The *Splendor Hotel* was near the North Bridge on Staden, which connected the main parts of the Northern Venice. The room next to his – or rather a suite of rooms – had been occupied by Señor Dias until that afternoon, when Dias had left, together with others of his staff who had stayed in less pretentious quarters. There was no chance, Palfrey was told, of booking a room there for that night. Palfrey, who badly wanted to be on the spot, telephoned the British Embassy; had they any influence?

They had.

The manager of the *Splendor,* who took them to their room and declared himself honoured to receive such guests, was shocked when they mentioned the death of Erikson. At the *Splendor!* Gentlemen, such things did not happen!

Palfrey looked at him levelly. 'I was talking on the telephone to Mr. Erikson when he died,' he said.

The manager apologised at once; he was sure that Dr. Palfrey understood that it was not good for the reputation of an hotel to have it known that there had been a sudden death in the telephone booths. In fact the unfortunate Herr Erikson had been taken ill while on the telephone, but had died in his room, where he had been taken by the attendants. The attendants had called for a doctor, perhaps Dr. Palfrey would like to consult him?

'Please,' said Palfrey.

The doctor, a young brisk man, came at once. He was the resident doctor, he said, and he had been on hand when called to Herr Erikson's bedside. There was no reasonable doubt that the cause of death was heart failure; perhaps it was known that Herr Erikson had a weak heart?

'Weak heart my foot!' said Bruton.

'I assure you—' began the doctor.

Palfrey said: 'It was probably a strong injection of nicotine, Doctor. Our friend was perfectly fit, but on a dangerous mission. Where is he now?'

'At the city morgue,' said the doctor, badly shaken. 'I can arrange for you to see him, Dr. Palfrey, if you would like that.'

Erikson had died hard, and death had not been kind. There was no sign of the smile which had been so characteristic of him in life. His lips were twisted, as if in pain, and his eyes were shadowed, as if he had known what was about to come to him, and had tried to fight it off.

Palfrey examined him …

There were two punctures. One, in the thigh, was older than the one in the arm – the right arm. Both were swollen a little where the injections had

been made. Palfrey examined them closely, asked for a magnifying-glass, peered intently through it, and then took out his penknife and probed gently. He removed a tiny strand of white cotton, hardly large enough to be seen by the naked eye, from the puncture in the right arm.

The doctor said: 'Then it was injected through his clothes!'

'While he was speaking on the telephone, yes,' said Palfrey. 'A bad business. Nicotine or a drug in the same category. There will have to be a *post mortem* please, to make sure.'

'Naturally,' said the doctor. 'I will make the arrangements at once. I hope that you do not think that I suspected anything of the kind.' He was obviously a little apprehensive. 'There were no indications, except of cardiac failure.'

'Of course not,' said Palfrey. 'It was induced cardiac failure. It would not have happened.' he added, *sotto voce,* 'if he hadn't got very close to the truth.'

'The truth, Doctor?'

'Sorry,' said Palfrey. 'I'm talking to myself.'

Bruton had finish his investigations, and was waiting in the hall. He was terse and to the point. Only a waiter had been near the spot at the time, and he had seen Erikson collapse. He could not explain it, for Herr Erikson had seemed so well only a short time before. He had seen two men near the telephones when Erikson had been in a booth but he did not remember them well.

'It was probably Lozana.'

'Or one of his breed,' said Palfrey. 'Have you found out where Neil had been?'

Bruton said: 'Yes. There was a note in his diary. Appointment to see Knudsen at two o'clock this afternoon. It looks as if he came straight back here and walked into it.'

Erikson had always kept a diary when he was working on his own. He had used a kind of shorthand which all the others could understand, but was Greek to anyone who did not know the system. The other notes were what they had expected; he had seen Dias and Lozana, there was no indication that they were *persona grata* with the Swedish authorities, and one official visitor had left Dias in a state of considerable anger.

'He probably had his marching orders then,' said Bruton. 'Dias hadn't been to see Knudsen, so far as Neil knew.'

They learned that Knudsen was away, but would be at his office next morning. That meant an evening with little to do.

They went upstairs to unpack their cases. As they reached a bend in the stairs a man who was coming towards them turned abruptly and retraced his steps. They did not see his face. Palfrey gripped Bruton's arm tightly, hurried up the next flight of stairs, and saw the other man turning into a passage. Palfrey approached it, and peered round the corner cautiously. A man was looking out of an open door, peering as Palfrey was doing, obviously anxious not to be seen.

A very thoughtful Palfrey moved quietly away. When he joined Bruton the American said; 'Now you've had a shock. Who was it?'

'Matthew Lumsden, brother of Charles,' said Palfrey.

'The man who was in Rotterdam?' said Bruton, sharply.

'Yes. Curious, isn't it? At the time it looked like a coincidence,' said Palfrey. 'Now I wonder. If he'd faced it out there wouldn't have been anything remarkable about it, but he didn't want to be seen.'

Bruton said: 'You'd better go to Knudsen's on your own. I'll keep an eye on Mr. Matthew.'

'Not this time,' said Palfrey. 'We'll work in pairs until it's over.'

'Okay,' said Bruton. He went on with his unpacking, folded a shirt and put it carefully away, then said abruptly: 'Sap, there's one thing that's giving me plenty to think about.'

'Only one?' asked Palfrey.

'This one matters,' said Bruton. 'Only two of the six people on the list I found in Lozana's room are alive. You're one, Knudsen's another.'

'I had noticed it,' said Palfrey, mildly. 'That's one of the reasons why I'd prefer company.'

Bruton nodded. 'Let's get out of here,' he said. 'I keep thinking that I can see Knudsen with a knife in his back.'

'We ought to find out where Bane is,' said Palfrey.

It was not remarkable that Bane was known at the hotel, and there was nothing really remarkable in the fact that he had given up his room and left about the same time as Dias. Palfrey wondered if he were justified in thinking it odd that Bane had left no message for them. Perhaps the American had been annoyed by Palfrey's continued distrust.

They went out to Knudsen's house, which was at Carlberg, built on a hill and surrounded by great pine trees which gave it protection against the high winds that sweep across Sweden from the Atlantic. From the hill the views were incomparable. They could see over the great city, built on land almost completely surrounded by water. The long tongue of Ulfsunda Fjord ran from Carlberg into the heart of the city, and was crowded with small craft.

In the far distance they could see the countless tiny islands off the coast; Staden which jutted out into the water, connected by three bridges to Norrmalm, and in a more southerly direction, Sodermalm.

They could see the great quays, the gardens and parks, bright green amongst the mass of buildings, the spires of the great church. The church of St. Johannes, high on the Brunkebergsas, towered above the city.

They did not go too near the house, but made inquiries at a small shop with a paper-stall outside, near the foot of the hill. They were looking for a friend who was to have met them there, they said – a very fat man.

Palfrey described Dias.

The old man at the stall was in no doubt; the man they described was like a man who had called once or twice, a man interested in the house on the hill. He had visited that house.

Palfrey thanked their informant warmly, and they returned to the

*Splendor.* Dias and Knudsen were, presumably, acquainted.

Palfrey and Bruton had not been followed.

They could not find Neilsen's name in the telephone directory, but they decided not to go to see the man that night. No one else whom they knew appeared to be at the hotel. The police visited them in connection with Erikson's death, and seemed reluctant to admit that he had been murdered; it might, they suggested, have been suicide.

Palfrey left them in no doubt of his opinion.

Early next morning they set out to call on Knudsen.

One of the things which most puzzled Palfrey was the fact that sometimes they were so closely watched that there seemed danger lurking at every corner, while at other times no one took the slightest interest in them. It might be that whenever they were dangerously close to Dias they were watched, and when he was safely away from them he withdrew his men.

Knudsen's office was in a tall white modern buildings near the docks, overlooking the port with its ceaseless activity. Small motor craft were moving briskly about the waters of the Lake Malar and, beyond Staden, the Saltsjo which stretched to the Baltic, forty miles away. In the distance they could see two larger vessels further out to sea, and, on the horizon, the smoke from a dozen or more small craft – fishing trawlers, Palfrey thought. Other steam trawlers were berthed and they could see fish being unloaded, great piles of silver shimmering in the morning sun. Everywhere wooded islands rose out of the water, some large but mostly small.

They went up to the fifth floor in an automatic lift.

Bruton said: 'I wonder where Bane has got to?'

'Wherever Dias is, I expect,' said Palfrey.

Knudsen's company had most of the fifth floor, which was an indication of its size. Name-plates showed that there was a Knudsen Fishing Company, a Knudsen Trawler Company, a Knudsen Wharf Company and several other associated firms. Mr. Knudsen was apparently a person of some importance.

His secretary obviously thought so; Mr. Knudsen *never* saw anyone without an appointment.

Palfrey took out a card and scribbled on it: *Erikson, who saw you yesterday, was killed soon after leaving you.* He gave it to the girl, who did not read it, but hurried across a large general office into a smaller one. By the door a man was standing, a powerful-looking fellow who looked curiously at Palfrey and Bruton.

The secretary came hurrying out.

'Mr. Knudsen will be free in five minutes,' she said, and asked them to sit down.

The powerful-looking man, as if in answer to a summons, went into the smaller office, while Palfrey sat back and looked about him. There were several powerful men in the outer office, and Palfrey noticed that they were all gathered near the door of Knudsen's office. He wondered if Knudsen knew that he was in some danger, and protected himself with a bodyguard – as Jacques Midaut had done before he had committed suicide.

Five minutes grew into ten before a bell rang. The girl jumped up.

'Mr. Knudsen is ready,' she said, and led them across the outer office.

The next room was not Knudsen's after all; three men were in there, as well as a middle-aged woman who looked up at them curiously. The three men were all sitting at-desks, but the powerful-looking man they had already noticed was by the door. He had his right hand in his pocket.

He stood aside to let them pass.

Palfrey looked round the large, well-furnished office before he looked at Knudsen. The room was panelled in light oak, the furniture was contemporary, adding up to an atmosphere of prosperity, almost ostentation. There were glass panels in the walls, about the height of a man's head; and through one he saw a man's face.

He no longer doubted that Knudsen took great care to protect himself.

Then he paid attention to the man.

Knudsen was younger than he had expected. A tall, spare, bony man, with a shock of fair hair, good features and a bright smile. He reminded Palfrey very much of Erikson. His hair was nearer white than yellow, and he was bigger, but he had a similar expression – a likeable man to look at.

He held out his hand, and his grip was firm.

The door closed on them, and they were alone in the office – but every movement would be watched through those spyholes.

'Well, gentlemen,' Knudsen spoke in English. 'I am grieved to hear about Herr Erikson. I did not know.'

'I wonder,' said Bruton, brusquely.

Knudsen looked at him, unoffended.

'I assure you, Mr.—'

'Bruton,' said Palfrey.

'That I had no idea Mr. Erikson had been injured,' said Knudsen. 'You are close friends of his, I imagine?'

'We are,' said Palfrey.

'And, presumably, you come on the same business,' said Knudsen. He brushed back his hair, and looked at them frankly. 'It had come to your friend's knowledge that I have had some dealings with a certain Señor Dias, and he was curious about Dias.'

'So are we,' said Bruton.

'I told him that Dias is an agent for a prominent South American meat-producing company,' said Knudsen, 'and that he wanted to do business with me. I told him, also, that I had refused.'

'May I ask why?' murmured Palfrey.

'Because I did not like Señor Dias,' said Knudsen.

Palfrey smiled. 'You know, it isn't even half good enough.' Some men, when that was said to them, would have bridled. Knudsen only smiled. 'A lot of things are not good enough,' said Palfrey. 'Your fears, for instance.'

'Fears?' echoed Knudsen.

'Men at the windows,' said Palfrey, 'and a guard at the door. Can't we be frank? Why didn't you deal with Dias?'

Knudsen said: ‘I did not like him, Dr. Palfrey.’

‘Oh. Bad for business,’ said Palfrey. ‘I mean, if you didn’t deal with people you don’t like, where would trade be? There are a remarkable number of unlikeable men in the world. May I tell you an interesting fact, Mr. Knudsen?’

‘Please,’ said Knudsen.

‘Thanks,’ murmured Palfrey. ‘There was a list in Lozana’s suitcase—you know Lozana?’

‘Yes, and also dislike him,’ said Knudsen.

‘On that list were six names,’ said Palfrey. ‘Only two of the six people named are still alive. I am one. You are the other.’

Knudsen’s expression did not change, unless it was for a slight hardening of his eyes.

‘A curious and interesting fact,’ said Palfrey. ‘You know you are in danger, don’t you? You have surrounded yourself with men to try to forestall that danger, but you’re not really confident. It isn’t pleasant to be under sentence of death.’

Knudsen said: ‘Are you trying to frighten me?’

‘Great Scott, no!’ exclaimed Palfrey. ‘The last thing in the world I would try to do! I leave that to Dias.’ He took out cigarettes, and noticed that as he put his hand towards his pocket Knudsen went tense. ‘Can we be honest with each other, Mr. Knudsen? Dias, you say, is your enemy. You have, so far, been able to keep him at bay. So have I. We have that much in common. I want to find out what Dias is doing. Among other things, I believe he knows where a substantial quantity of radium is hidden in Europe. I am a doctor. I know how badly that radium is needed.’

He paused, and Knudsen said: ‘I know nothing about any radium, Dr. Palfrey.’

‘You know a lot about Dias,’ said Palfrey. ‘Was he here a great deal during the war?’

After a long silence, a silence during which Palfrey and Bruton stared hard at the other man, Knudsen leaned forward and picked up a pen. He toyed with it as he spoke.

‘Yes, Dr. Palfrey, a great deal. His official reason was to keep open trade channels between Sweden and South America,’ said Knudsen, ‘but in my opinion—and many people shared that opinion—he was acting as an agent for Nazi Germany. I have no time for pro-Nazis, Dr. Palfrey—I had no time for them during the war, when I was compelled to trade with them, and I certainly have none now. I arranged, in fact, for Dias to be removed from the country. I have some influence.’

‘And he’s gone?’ said Palfrey.

‘Yes.’

‘But you still surround yourself with guards,’ said Palfrey. ‘So there are sympathisers for the Nazi cause in Sweden, I suppose? Or else friends of Dias.’

‘I do not trust him,’ said Knudsen. ‘He knows that I was instrumental in

having him sent out of the country, and he is hostile because of that'

Palfrey said: 'And for other reasons? You won't encourage others to do business with him, perhaps?'

'I will not,' said Knudsen.

Bruton said, restlessly: 'Are we getting anywhere?'

'I think so,' said Palfrey, with an amiable smile. 'Progress is slow, that's all. You had another visitor here about the time that Dias was in Stockholm didn't you? William K. Bane.'

Knudsen snapped: 'What do you know of Bane?'

'We're old friends,' said Palfrey.

'You and Bane are *friends?*' said Knudsen, and before they realised what he was about to do, he lifted the telephone. 'Get me Mr. Bane,' he said. 'Yes, at once, at the *Splendor.*' He held on while he looked at Palfrey, still smiling, but with an air of tension. Palfrey said nothing; Bruton took out a cigar and cut the end. 'Hallo,' said Knudsen, abruptly. 'Bane—this is Knudsen. I have a Dr. Palfrey here …'

He talked for some time, then listened, relaxed, laughed, and replaced the receiver.

'I was surprised,' he said, 'because a friend of William K. Bane's is aways welcome here. *Now,* Dr. Palfrey, what do you really want?'

# Chapter Thirty

## Influx into Stockholm

'I want to know why you are afraid,' said Palfrey.

Knudsen laughed. 'Fear is comparative, Dr. Palfrey. I am not particularly frightened. On the other hand, I would prefer to live. There is much to do, and I am vain enough to think that there are some things which I can do better than anyone else. Dias has good reason to want me dead. I have obstructed him wherever possible. I am, as you see, a private citizen. I do not have to be diplomatic. I do not know exactly what Dias is doing, but I believe that it is wholly evil. For one thing, there is no doubt, I think, that he is deeply involved in Black Market operations.'

'In Stockholm?' asked Palfrey, quickly.

'There is little of that in Stockholm,' said Knudsen. 'Our food stocks have never been depleted as they have in other countries. We are suppliers more than buyers. Dias wanted to buy a large proportion of my fishing-fleet's catch this year. It is a big fleet, and conditions are likely to be good. He also wanted to buy the catch of other fleets—that was his purpose in Stockholm. He failed completely, Dr. Palfrey, because I warned the others not to deal with him.'

'You're dead set against him?' Palfrey said.

Knudsen laughed again. 'Yes, of course. I think the man is evil.'

'Thinking isn't enough,' said Palfrey, bluntly.

Knudsen shrugged. 'Very well, then I *know* he is. Bane has told me a great deal of what he has done. I would like you to understand this, Dr. Palfrey—I am *not* going to take any part in creating diplomatic difficulties for my country. Dias's activities elsewhere are unimportant to me. I mean to make sure that he cannot work in Stockholm, and I think I have made sure of that. If he still hopes, he will undoubtedly try to kill me. That is the simple truth, Dr. Palfrey.'

'And Dias's only purpose in coming here was to buy fish?' said Palfrey. As he spoke he remembered de Morency's scorn when he had learned that Lozana was, ostensibly, selling beef. De Morency's voice seemed to ring in his ears.

'That is the only purpose of which I am aware,' said Knudsen, with the deliberation of a man who has said his last word. 'If, as I imagine, you are opposing him for others reasons than mine, Dr. Palfrey, you have my very good wishes. Now, I am a busy man. I know you will forgive me if I say that I can spare no more time.'

Palfrey said: 'What did you tell Erikson?'

'My dear sir—'

'Erikson learned something from you, your name was on his lips when he died,' said Palfrey. 'He learned something from you and was about to pass it

on, or he learned something *about* you. Which was it, Knudsen?'

'You are very persistent, Dr. Palfrey,' said Knudsen, 'but I assure you that I told your friend Erikson exactly the same as I told you. In fact I think I can prove it! I was not sure, you see, whether Erikson could be trusted. He might have been an emissary of Dias. And for my own protection, in case he became violent and there were unhappy consequences, I had a record taken of the conversation. One is taken of ours, also!' He laughed as he pressed a bell, and the fair-haired, harassed secretary came in breathlessly. Knudsen spoke to her in Swedish. She answered, hurried out and came back wheeling the audition part of a dictaphone. She put a cylinder on, pressed a switch and stood back.

Knudsen waved her away.

As the door closed, the noise of the turning cylinder faded, for Knudsen was speaking from the dictaphone. '*Yes, Mr. Erikson,*' he said.

Erikson's voice followed.

Palfrey and Bruton sat quite still, listening to that voice out of the past. Erikson was friendly; he had always been a good interviewer. Knudsen had been as friendly to Erikson as he had been towards them. As the cylinder went on, Bruton's attention wandered, as if he disliked hearing the dead man's voice. Palfrey's remained riveted on the conversation.

There was the scrape of a chair and a sound of footsteps from the dictaphone. '*Show Mr. Erikson out, please,*' came Knudsen's voice. '*Goodbye, Mr. Erikson. I am sorry I could not give you more information.*'

'*You've been very kind,*' came Erikson's voice.

Knudsen leaned forward and switched off, with a flourish.

'Are you satisfied, Dr. Palfrey?'

Palfrey beamed. 'Yes, yes, thanks very much! You *have* been very kind—and patient. I suppose I can't beg that record from you?'

'Why should you want to?' demanded Knudsen, and his voice was sharper than it had been; Palfrey thought that there was an air of greater tension.

'Sentimental value,' Palfrey murmured.

Knudsen said: 'I wish I could give it you, but there are other confidential matters on the record. I might be able to have it scraped so that only that conversation remains, Dr. Palfrey, and if I can I will have it sent to you.'

'Thanks very much,' said Palfrey.

He seemed very pleased with himself when he left the office and was smiling happily as they slowly descended in the lift, down the well with the long window through which they could see so much of the docks and the harbour. Bruton was frowning, for he could see nothing about which to be particularly satisfied. Palfrey knew that he was puzzled and even a little irritated by his own attitude.

Only when they were back at the *Splendor* did Bruton say in a sharp voice: 'Why are you grinning so broadly?'

Palfrey said: 'Because we're nearly at the end of the hunt.'

Bruton said: 'After what we heard there?'

'Yes,' said Palfrey.

'You're not yourself,' said Bruton.

Palfrey said: 'Think again Corny.' He waited until they were in their room, and Bruton was standing with his back to the window, glowering at him. The truth was that Erikson's voice had affected the American, and it was sounding in his ears all the time – as if Erikson were talking to him. '*You've been very kind.*'

'I can't think,' he said, abruptly.

'All right, try criticising my line of reasoning,' said Palfrey. 'Knudsen is our man—or one of them.'

'But—'

'Give me a chance,' protested Palfrey. 'Knudsen lied to us and lied to Neil. He nearly succeeded in the biggest and cleverest lie I've ever heard, and he may try to clinch success with that one. I mean the record.'

'That *was* Neil's voice!' Bruton barked.

'Oh yes. But Knudsen switched off before the record was quite played out. There was half an inch left on the cylinder, and a lot can be recorded on half an inch of shellac. But that was confirmation of suspicions. The first mistake he made was telephoning Bane.'

Bruton said: 'I don't get it.'

'My dear chap! He told the operator to get Bane at the *Splendor*. We have made close inquiries here, and are told that Bane left the day before yesterday. There is a choice of one of two things; either Bane is still here, under a different name and lying low, or else Knudsen did not get in touch with him.'

Bruton's eyes were brighter. 'Yes, but—'

'I think he talked to Bane,' said Palfrey.

'But Bane's with us!'

'We've taken a lot about Bane for granted,' said Palfrey. 'We believed him when he told us that he was working for the State Department and when Brett confirmed that, but—'

'Hold it,' said Bruton. 'I don't think a lot of the State Department about many things, but it wouldn't lie.'

'Bane would lie to it,' said Palfrey.

Bruton drew in a sharp breath.

'Bane would be prepared to lie to the State Department or anyone else, if it suited him,' said Palfrey. 'What better cover could there be to activities on the European Black Market than Bane's? He could safely chase after Dias—oh, it is extremely clever,' said Palfrey. 'Probably one of the cleverest bluffs we've met, but if Knudsen spoke to Bane this morning, Bane's in this up to the neck—*and* Knudsen is with him.'

Bruton said: 'I still don't get it, Sap. Bane could have finished you a long time ago. Bane told you that Dias was in the Black Market. Half of what we know is from Bane. And there was the shooting at the *Maas Hotel.* It doesn't add up.'

'The *Maas Hotel* affair could easily have been faked,' said Palfrey. 'If Dias and Bane knew Stefan was outside, then every word could have been uttered

to make us trust Bane.'

'They shot at him,' said Bruton.

'They missed him, but they didn't miss Raoul,' said Palfrey. 'Think about it, Corny.'

'I'm thinking all right,' said Bruton. 'Have your forgotten that Bane told us Dias was in Berlin?'

'He knew we were bound to find out. He didn't tell us a thing we didn't know ourselves. And he was friendly with Muriel, remember—one of Dias's brigade. Naturally, Muriel was the go-between—*is* the go-between. And something happened in that office when Neil was there. He came straight here and tried to telephone me, but was killed because of what he had learned in that office. Probably Bane turned up when he wasn't expected—or even Dias might have shown up. Knudsen saw a wonderful chance of proving his goodwill by letting us hear most of what was recorded, but he switched off a little too abruptly.'

After a long pause, Bruton said: 'You may be right. I wouldn't put it any higher than that.'

Palfrey said: Tricky things, dictaphones, aren't they?'

'I'm not sure that this one hasn't gone to your head.'

'Oh, it has,' said Palfrey. 'I'm inclined to think that there is one in the room. Dias, we know, had the suite next to this. I wonder if Bane's there now? Or if Dias, by any chance, is still there?' He was looking about the room, unconcerned, his hands thrust deep in his pocket. 'Shall we look round?'

'I suppose we'd better,' said Bruton, resignedly. 'I won't have any peace until we have. Where shall we start? Under the bed?'

Palfrey looked towards the wardrobe, the only piece of furniture against one wall.

'No, there,' he said. 'That's the wall we share with the room which Dias had.' He was smiling brightly, as if he were quite sure of himself. Bruton strode towards the wardrobe, and Palfrey watched him, waited until he put a hand out to open it, and said: 'Not too much noise, Corny.'

Bruton opened the wardrobe door quietly. He lifted clothes-hangers off the rail, brought out a few oddments of clothing, and then stepped into the wardrobe. Palfrey joined him, after switching on the light so that they could see better inside. The wardrobe seemed to be made of solid wood. Bruton took a pencil torch from his pocket and flashed it about the inside, without speaking.

Suddenly he stopped moving, and shone it on to one particular spot, near the floor. Palfrey peered at the same spot. It looked as if a piece of yellow wood had been built into the back of the wardrobe.

Bruton began to speak. 'I—'

Palfrey gripped his arm.

Bruton stopped, and went down on one knee. Palfrey decided that it would be better to leave the other a clear field, and stood back. Bruton was some time examining the wood, and when he backed out of the wardrobe he

closed the door softly, and then whispered:

'That hides a microphone, Sap!'

'So they know what we know,' murmured Palfrey. 'I thought of that a shade too late,' He laughed, without amusement. 'Well, we seem to be wasting our time,' he added more loudly, but he was pointing towards the door.

Bruton went towards it with him; both knew that they had one chance – to act before action was taken against them.

They opened the door and peered along the passage. No one was in sight. In a trice Bruton reached the door of the next room with his penknife in hand. Palfrey kept watch. Bruton found the door difficult, and he was working on it for at least three minutes before the lock clicked back – and the click seemed very loud.

Bruton acted swiftly.

He kicked open the door, ducked, and rushed into the room. The door crashed back against the wall. Palfrey followed with his gun in hand.

A man was standing near a small loudspeaker through which voices in the next room could be relayed and magnified so that everything said there was audible. The man looked dumbfounded; he had been taken completely by surprise.

'Why, hallo,' said Palfrey, and closed the door behind him. 'Matthew, isn't it? Brother of Charles. *Don't* tell me that you're a friend of His Excellency Señor Fernandez y Dias. Or William K. Bane. Or Josh Anderson. Or Knudsen. Come on,' he added, encouragingly, 'we won't bite provided you behave yourself. Tell me, does Charles know you're here?'

# Chapter Thirty-One

## Brother of Charles

Matthew Lumsden began to shake. The tremors started at his hands and gradually spread to his whole body. He stood quivering, his mouth opened and closed and his teeth chattered. Naked fear was in his eyes; extremity of fear showed in the pallor of his cheeks and the helpless way in which his knees sagged. He staggered to one side, stretched out a hand and supported himself against the back of a chair.

'Why don't you sit down?' murmured Palfrey.

The man could not sit down; he could not move the chair nor walk the few steps necessary. He was a complete and quivering wreck. Palfrey felt a contempt such as he had felt for few men, and Bruton's hard eyes reflected the same emotion.

Abruptly, Bruton said: 'We'd better get out of here. It isn't safe.'

'Yes,' said Palfrey. 'Find an empty room. It doesn't matter whether it's booked or not.'

He waited alone with Charles's brother, who watched him but made no movement. He examined the microphone, seeing how cleverly it was wired, then looked about the room at the personal luggage. There were several suit-cases with the initials M.L. on them, but a travelling-trunk and two pig-skin cases had the initials W.K.B. So Bane had been staying next door to them. He opened the door leading to the next room of the suite: it was empty. So was the bathroom. He returned to the middle of the room as Bruton came back.

'Okay,' he said. 'Come on, you.' He gripped Matthew's shoulder and pushed him towards the door. Almost opposite them another door stood open. Matthew nearly fell as Bruton pushed him into the room opposite. The others followed and closed the door.

'I happen to know that the man who was staying here paid his bill this morning,' Bruton said, 'and the maids have finished, so we ought to be all right for a few hours.'

'We ought to get our luggage out of our room,' Palfrey said, 'and play the same trick as William K. Bane. They'll be after us in no time. I wonder if the manager can be trusted?'

'Trust no one here,' said Bruton, with feeling. 'Remember what Brett told us—avoid trouble in Sweden. I'll get the grips. Don't be too easy on this guy, Sap. He was one of those who helped to kill Neil.'

He flung out of the room, and Palfrey knew that he preferred to go, for if he had stayed he would have found it difficult to keep his hands off Matthew Lumsden.

Lumsden tried to speak. 'I—I—I—' he began, and then gave up, but looked at Palfrey appealingly, as if he were afraid of the physical vengeance

to come and was desperately anxious to save himself. Palfrey remembered when he had seen the man for the first time, so full of self-assurance and so disdainful of him. He was surprised; and yet at the back of his mind there was a feeling that he ought to have expected this, that it fitted in somewhere with the mystery.

'I—I didn't—know—about—Erikson,' Matthew gasped, and Palfrey could just understand the words.

'Didn't you?' asked Palfrey. . He was not thinking of Matthew now. He was wondering what chance he and Bruton would have when the others realised what had happened. He had no doubt that he was right. Bane, Knudsen and Dias were in this together. Yet there was no actual proof of their part in the conspiracy, certainly no proof which would satisfy the Swedish authorities, and there was little doubt that Knudsen had the ear of the Government. He and Bruton were very much on their own: they, could not even safely appeal for help to the British Embassy. They could go there for temporary sanctuary, but there was far too much to do outside, and if they entered its portals now they would be unable to take any further part in operations on Swedish soil; all the time there was the nightmare of upsetting diplomatic relations.

Here was emergency, stark and clear.

Palfrey saw now why Brett had encouraged him to come as a private individual; had he been a member of Z.5 the Government must have taken some responsibility for his actions. Brett had been determined not to risk international complications. Yes, that was clear, and other things were falling into place.

Matthew muttered: 'I—I tell you I didn't.'

The door opened again. Bruton brought in two cases and dumped them down, then went out.

Palfrey said: 'Bane has been staying here, hasn't he?'

'Y-y-yes.'

'And Knudsen has visited you here.'

'N-no,' said Matthew.

'Then you've been to see Knudsen.'

'Yes,' said Matthew. 'Yes, I—' He paused again as the door opened and Bruton brought in the one remaining case and their coats and hats.

Bruton locked the door. Matthew licked his lips and stared at the American, who stood with his feet planted wide apart and his hands at his waist, like a wrestler about to spring at his opponent. Matthew drew back towards the window fearfully.

'What were you going to say?' demanded Palfrey.

'What—what are you going to do to me?'

'That depends on what you've done,' said Palfrey.

Matthew gasped: 'I haven't done anything. I—I was compelled to help a little, but I've done nothing myself, I've only taken a few messages from—from one to another. Bane—Bane got his hands on me a year ago; I haven't been able to call my life my own. I tell you it's Bane's fault, not mine—it's

Bane's fault! He said Erikson had to be killed; he said it, I argued, I tried to save Erikson, but they wouldn't listen to me!' He was sweating freely, and some colour had come back in his cheeks. He was still staring at Bruton, as if aware that the greatest danger was likely to come from him. 'You mustn't blame me!' he cried. 'It wasn't me!'

Palfrey said: 'Bane and Knudsen work with Dias, don't they?'

'Yes.'

'Has Knudsen been working for Dias long?'

'I—I don't think so,' said Matthew. 'I don't know a lot about the work, I've only travelled for them. I can tell you this: Dias didn't know Knudsen at first, he was going to—he was going to kill Knudsen, then Bane came along. Bane's the real leader, he—'

'Bane and who else?' growled Bruton.

Palfrey looked sharply at him; Bruton might make Matthew tongue-tied again; the man was now blue with fear. Matthew licked his lips and backed further towards the window, as if anxious to put as much distance as he could between himself and Bruton. Bruton stayed where he was.

'Go on, Matthew,' said Palfrey. 'What you tell us now will make all the difference to you later. This is a world-wide Black Market, with Bane as the guiding spirit, Dias his chief travelling agent and Knudsen his Swedish agent. Is that it?'

'Yes.'

'We're doing very well,' said Palfrey. 'Now—'

The glass of the window crashed in.

It happened without warning. Palfrey was in the middle of speaking when the glass broke with a crash and splinters flew about the room. Bruton leapt forward, Palfrey cried 'Keep away from there!' He dodged to one side, while Matthew Lumsden staggered away from the window, reeling drunkenly, horror in his face. Horror and pain, for at the side of his head there was an ugly wound, blood was already oozing from it.

He pitched forward on his face and lay still.

Bruton was close by the window, gun in hand, peering out cautiously. A bullet hit the wall near the door, opposite the window. After that there was silence except for Palfrey's movements as he crawled on his hands and knees towards Matthew, keeping below the level of the window-sill. He turned the man over gently, then half lifted him and dragged him away from the window, towards the bed. He pulled a pillow from the bed and put it under Matthew's head, but he did not think there was any chance that Matthew would regain consciousness; the wound had gone deep, scoring a groove across the side of his head, ending just above the left eye.

The pillow was soon soaked with blood.

Bruton said: They fired from the window opposite, Sap. They must have watched us. We'd better get out while the going's good.'

'Yes,' said Palfrey. 'Take the small cases.'

'Okay. Don't waste any time.'

Palfrey said: 'Go to the door and keep watch.'

Bruton hesitated only for a moment. As he moved out of the room, carrying one small case, Palfrey ran through Matthew's pockets and took out all the papers he could find, the mail's wallet, and – from his waistcoat pocket – a watch-chain charm in the shape of a black mask. He stuffed them all into his own pockets. He felt Matthew's pulse, which was so faint that it was hardly noticeable; Matthew would probably be dead within ten minutes.

He hurried after Bruton, picking up his case as he went. Bruton was looking out of the room opposite, so placed that he could see either end of the passage. 'Come on,' he said, and stepped out into the passage.

'Not the front way,' Palfrey said. 'Fire-escape.'

'We're heading for trouble whichever way we go,' Bruton said.

As they turned towards the end of the passage, where there was an emergency exit, heavy footsteps sounded round the comer. They reached the exit, and Palfrey unbolted the door while Bruton kept watch on the far end of the passage. The footsteps drew nearer. A man turned the corner, a man whom Bruton did not know, but Charles Lumsden would have recognised as one of the men who had been in the house in London.

'Don't shoot if you can help it!' Palfrey called.

The man at the other end of the passage drew a gun, but then another man turned the corner and banged into him; it was Lozana. Bruton backed on to the fire-escape and slammed the door, but it could not be fastened from the outside. Palfrey was already half-way down the fire-escape. Bruton went part of the way down the last flight of iron steps, then swung over the railings and leapt to the ground. He touched the courtyard before Palfrey.

The door above opened, and Lozana and his companion appeared.

'Keep close to the wall,' Palfrey said.

They kept close and ran, hampered only by their cases. They heard the iron steps reverberating to the tread of the two men on their heels. As they reached the corner of the building, near the kitchen quarters, two other men appeared, dusky-looking fellows each of whom had his right hand in his pocket. They came out of a doorway at the side of the hotel.

'That's one way,' Bruton said.

He flung himself forward.

He took the men completely by surprise, reaching one and sent him flying against the other. A gun dropped from one man's hand, and Palfrey gave it a flying kick, sending it yards away. Bruton recovered and rushed in Palfrey's wake. They turned along a narrow passage and raced towards the far end, where they could see the high brick wall which surrounded part of the *Splendor*. Beyond that wall was the main road. If they turned right they would get to the main entrance hall, through a side door, and there would be crowds of people in that entrance hall.

Footsteps were echoing on the stone flooring of the courtyard. The passage along which they raced separated one part of the hotel from another.

Palfrey knew that from a room opposite they had been seen; the bullet which had killed Matthew Lumsden had been fired across this passage. He

could not now think how it had happened that they had been seen in that 'borrowed' room, but turned into the doorway, grateful for the revolving doors.

'We'll stay in here a moment,' he said.

Bruton, just behind him, grunted a response. They stood inside the partition hidden from outside as well as from inside. Palfrey smoothed down his hair and his coat, and then someone pushed the door from the inside.

He staggered out; Bruton came a moment later, almost pitching forward at the feet of a middle-aged woman who drew back with an exclamation of alarm.

'Sorry!'gasped Bruton.

They were too closely pursued for *finesse*. They raced across the crowded entrance hall, scattering people right and left. As they reached the main doors, Palfrey glanced over his shoulder and saw Lozana. Much now depended on whether Lozana would make it obvious that he was in pursuit. Palfrey dashed out of the hotel and banged into a commissionaire.

'Sorry,' he said. 'Taxi, quickly!'

Training won the day; the commissionaire was obviously startled by Palfrey's appearance and his breathlessness, but turned to get a taxi. There was one drawing up, disgorging passengers who were apparently in a hurry, and did not wait for change. Palfrey held the door open, the commissionaire was left grasping the air. Bruton hurried into the taxi, and Palfrey called in a loud voice:

'The United States Embassy—hurry!'

Many people were staring at them, and on the steps of the hotel, his hands in his pockets in an endeavour to look unconcerned, was Lozana. He was not taking any chances of being delayed by the police, he showed no outward signs of malice, but the man who had been with him was beckoning another taxi frantically.

Bruton gasped: 'Why the Embassy?'

'We'll change directions later,' said Palfrey.

He looked out of the small rear window. Lozana was stepping into the second taxi and his companion was giving orders. Two more men, those whom Bruton had delayed, hurried from the hotel, and climbed in as the taxi moved off. The first taxi had a start of thirty or forty yards; it would have been greater but for the streams of traffic. There were traffic lights at crossroads immediately ahead.

Palfrey leaned forward and spoke to the driver.

'Go straight ahead—then turn right and right again.'

Unthinkingly, he spoke in English. The Swede turned and gave him a vast, reassuring grin, and said: 'Yes, *sir*!'

They were among the last vehicles over the cross-roads before the traffic lights changed. Bruton relaxed for the first time, and took his turn in looking out.

'They're well behind,' he said, 'but where does the first right and the first right after that take us?'

‘I don’t know,’ said Palfrey. He tapped the driver on the shoulder and continued to speak in English. ‘We want to get away from a taxi which is following us—do you understand?’

‘Yes, *sir!’* roared the driver. ‘I see him!’ He roared with laughter, and people stared at him from the sidewalk. ‘Leave it, please, to me.’

He trod on the accelerator and swung right, then right again, then left and along a wide thoroughfare with shops on either side. A few hundred yards further he turned to the left again, and after a mile or two they were on a road which led uphill, past smaller shops, and with a church on the summit of the hill immediately ahead of them. When they reached the top they saw another road junction; five or six roads converged there. The taxi, rattling along at a furious pace, turned into one of the roads, and soon they found themselves in a residential suburb. Some way along the main road the driver turned into a garage outside which two or three other taxis were standing. He pulled over to the side of the garage, jumped out of his seat, raised a warning hand and went towards the door.

Palfrey and Bruton watched him breathlessly.

‘I think we’ve lost them,’ Bruton said.

‘I hope so,’ said Palfrey.

The driver was away for at least five minutes. When he came back he was beaming broadly and had his thumbs up. Palfrey got out of the taxi, smoothed down his hair, and said: ‘You’ve been very good.’

‘I am glad to help,’ said the Swede, cheerfully. ‘I have a great admiration for the English. Where are you going, please?’

‘That’s a poser,’ Palfrey said. ‘Poser?’ The man looked startled.

‘A problem,’ said Palfrey.

The driver looked a little less happy as he glanced from one to the other, and rubbed the flat of his hand along his trousers. Palfrey knew that it was dawning on him that they had fled from the police. Palfrey was wondering how far they could use the taxi and take advantage of the driver’s obvious friendliness. A few words would set his mind at rest about the police, but would they be justified? Matthew Lumsden was dead by now; it was possible that Bane or Knudsen would accuse them of the murder. The police might already be hunting for them; if Bane or Knudsen succeeded in putting the machinery of the law into action it would move rapidly.

Bruton said: ‘Sap, I wonder if Neilsen *is* at home. The Marquis said he lives in Bikka Street.’

‘Bikka Street,’ said the driver. ‘That is in Haga.’

‘Where are we now?’ asked Palfrey.

‘Rorstrand.’

‘Are we far from Haga?’

‘It is north,’ said the driver, ‘a long way north.’

‘Can you take us there?’ asked Palfrey.

‘I *can,*’ said the driver. He hesitated, looked from Palfrey to Bruton and back again, and then said decidedly: ‘Yes, I will take you. It will cost one hundred krone.’

‘That’s all right,’ said Palfrey.

The driver was obviously still a little uneasy. He hustled them into the taxi, exchanged a few words with a colleague who was washing down another taxi, and then drove off at high speed. They did not touch the centre of the town, but drove along a fine road, through wooded tree-clad country, with glimpses from time to time of a vast stretch of water which shimmered beneath the bright sun and tree-clad islands raising rocky heads clear from the surface. It was cold, and Palfrey began to feel it for the first time. Now and again he shivered.

Haga, the residential suburb on the shores of the Brunnsulken, had a position of such beauty that, had he had more time to look about him, Palfrey would have been enthralled. Now he was filled with burning anxiety. Neilsen had been a resident agent in Stockholm at the beginning of the war, had been injured and put on the retired list. The Marquis had specifically mentioned him, but he might not be at home; if he were, he would joyfully help them.

They reached the top of the hill leading to the suburb, and looked down on more tree-clad slopes, dotted with white houses, their red and blue roofs catching the sun. It was a modern fairy-land. Beyond the shores the tiny wooded islands which starred the lake appeared in sharp relief.

‘Bikka Street,’ said the taxi-driver, aloud. He slowed down and called to a woman, who directed him. Soon they were in a winding road with houses of pleasing aspect on either side, set in trim gardens, with rows of great trees between each garden. Every house had a number.

‘Neilsen’s number is 36,’ Bruton said.

‘We are near,’ said the taxi-driver, and pulled up outside a white house with a finely built rockery, and stone steps leading to the front door.

‘You’ve been very good,’ said Palfrey. ‘We hope to find friends here.’ He took out his wallet and put two 100-krone notes into the man’s hand. He smiled. ‘Don’t believe what you might hear about us, please—and say nothing!’

‘I have a silent tongue,’ said the taxi-driver. He saluted and made off, and Palfrey and Bruton stood watching him. He disappeared round a bend in the road, their last link with the immediate past. They looked at each other, unsmiling, and then Bruton grinned and took out a cigar.

‘We’ve been lucky so far. Maybe we’ll get another break. Come on.’

They walked side by side up the steep path to the front door. Palfrey rang the bell. There were two doors, and between them a glass-enclosed hall, one side with painted wooden shelves where plants grew in profusion.

The interval before their ring was answered seemed unending but Palfrey did not ring again.

He was trying to weigh up the situation, to calculate their chances. Much had happened so swiftly that there had been little time to think. Knowing that Bane, Knudsen and Dias were in league with one another was one thing; proving it another. If they had managed to escape with Matthew Lumsden their task would have been much easier, but now the immediate prospects

were bleak. He admitted that he thought it unlikely that Knudsen would keep away from the police, it was almost certain that the hunt was on. And there was Lozana and his bunch of thugs; they would not give up easily, and they would not take chances.

The door opened and a trim-looking woman stood there.

Palfrey said, in English: 'Is this the home of Mr. Neilsen?'

'Yes,' she said, and to their astonishment she smiled warmly. 'You are Dr. Palfrey, I think? My husband has been expecting you. Please come in.'

# Chapter Thirty-Two

## The Long Arm of the Marquis

Neilsen was a dapper, dark-haired man, anything but a typical Swede. He came hurrying along the hall as they entered. His left coat-sleeve was empty, his right hand was extended and gripped first Palfrey's, then Bruton's, with obvious pleasure. He was smiling broadly as he led a bewildered Palfrey in to a long room on the right. His wife went off, murmuring something about luncheon, while Bruton rolled his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other, and said:

'So you were expecting us?'

Neilsen laughed. 'The Marquis told me you might look in.'

'*Did* he!' exclaimed Palfrey. 'When?'

'By cable, yesterday,' said Neilsen. 'He also said that he expected you would be in some trouble if you came—is that so?'

'Plenty of trouble,' said Bruton, and drew a deep breath. 'The sly old fox!'

'There is not much that the Marquis does not anticipate,' said Neilsen. 'But, my friends, sit down! You are quite safe here, I assure you. If there should be an alarm there is a path at the back of the house which will lead to sanctuary for the time being, and we shall not be caught unawares. What has been happening?'

They told him, briefly, enough to make him realise the seriousness of the situation. Bruton did most of the talking. Palfrey was trying to digest the fact that the long arm of the Marquis had reached out so swiftly to Stockholm and brought them at least temporary sanctuary. It was good to sit back at ease, with a man whom they knew to be a friend; good to see the glow in Neilsen's eyes, proof, if proof were needed, that he longed to be back with Z.5, and was reliving that part of his life which he had spent in the service.

When they had finished talking, Neilsen said, thoughtfully:

'You were wise to lodge no complaint against Knudsen, he is well respected here, and has powerful friends. I will not ask if you can be mistaken—for my part I do not greatly like the man. I was convinced that during the war he did more than trade with the Nazis because he had to, I was never sure that his sympathies were pro-Allied. That does not greatly matter. What matters is what you are going to do now.'

'First, send word to Brett,' said Palfrey. 'Then get word to Drusilla and Stefan, to make sure they don't walk into trouble at the *Splendor*. When that's done I'd better go and see Bane again,' he added. 'He'll still be there—Neilsen can probably find which room.'

'Openly?' asked Neilsen, in surprise.

Palfrey smiled. 'No. By night. Much rests on Bane, and getting a confession from him. Everything rests on that, I suppose. It's a thousand

pities they killed Matthew Lumsden.'

'Obviously they knew the danger,' Neilsen said. 'When is your wife due at the *Splendor!*'

'It might be any time,' said Palfrey.

'I must go myself,' said Neilsen; 'no one else will recognise her—although there are several people in Stockholm who would recognise Stefan! I will go at once and have a word with my friends—there are still some who will gladly work with me again.'

'What trouble will you get into if we're caught here?' asked Bruton.

'Don't worry about that,' said Neilsen cheerfully.

He left almost immediately, driving a small Opel car. When he had gone Palfrey and Bruton washed and tidied up in the spacious bathroom, looking over the lake from the window, content for the time being with the way things were working out for them.

Neilsen's wife called them to lunch; there were *hors d'oeuvres* as only Scandinavians know them, strange shellfish, fleshy fish as tiny as sardines but not cured in oil, all topped with raw egg and a piquant sauce, a meal in itself. Broiled trout followed and, for Bruton, ice cream – the presentation of which gave Mrs. Neilsen obvious delight. She spoke good English; she knew what work Neilsen had done before his injury, and it did not seem to occur to her that complications might follow their visit. She led them upstairs, after lunch, to a long, low-ceilinged room overlooking the lake, a room with twin beds where, she said, they should rest and look out of the window and feast themselves on the beauties of Sweden, and be ready for what the night might bring forth.

There was no question of resting.

They examined Matthew Lumsden's papers, which told them nothing, and talked in low-pitched voices. There was a hush over Haga, and it seemed that loud voices would break the spell of security which had come upon them. There was something illusory about that security; it might be broken at anytime. When they heard a car moving along the road they stopped and listened, but the cars all went past. They watched the clock at first. An hour passed, and they had said all that they could usefully say. The problem was crystal clear; they had to prove their case against Bane and the others. Bane would be warned now, there was no question of taking him by surprise. Two hours passed. Mrs. Neilsen called them; if they were awake, they would be ready for tea.

They were at tea, served at the table, a meal far larger than they wanted, when the telephone rang. Mrs. Neilsen jumped up, went out of the room to answer, and then called: 'Doctor, it is for you.'

Palfrey hurried into the hall. 'Hallo,' he said, and to his surprise heard Stefan's voice.

*'Hallo!'* he cried.

'Sap, listen,' said Stefan urgently. 'Drusilla is with Muriel and Charles at the *Splendor,* there was no chance to get them away. They are with Bane, of course, and I do not think they will be there long. I have talked to Bane.'

Palfrey said in a tense voice: ‘Go on.’

‘It is the old story,’ Stefan said, ‘except, of course, that we cannot rely on anything that Bane promises. He offers Drusilla’s life for yours and Corny’s.’

‘As simply as that,’ said Palfrey, heavily.

‘As simply as that.’

‘Where are you?’

‘Near the *Splendor*. I am watched. Neilsen gave me a message—I do not think he is watched yet. It would not be wise for me to come to you, it will only bring them to your hiding-place, and that may be useful later on.’

‘Can you speak to Neilsen?’

‘Yes, he is waiting near the telephone-box, as if he wishes to use it. I can open the door enough for him to hear.’

‘Ask him to tell you of a place where we can go,’ said Palfrey, ‘and then to come back here. If he can arrange for a taxi it will be a help.’

‘I do not think there will be much chance of obtaining a taxi,’ said Stefan. ‘There is a police search going on for you and Corny; this man Knudsen has acted swiftly. You are, of course, accused of Matthew Lumsden’s murder.’

‘You know a lot about it,’ Palfrey said.

‘Bane was very informative,’ said Stefan.

‘And cock-a-hoop,’ guessed Palfrey. ‘All right, Stefan. I’ll be ready to move as soon as Neilsen names the meeting place. It will have to be after dark, but that won’t mean a long wait, it gets dark early here. Is there any way of finding out when Drusilla leaves the *Splendor!*’

‘Neilsen has promised to do all he can,’ said Stefan. ‘Goodbye, my friend.’

He rang off.

Palfrey replaced the receiver slowly, and turned to see Bruton and Neilsen’s wife looking at him anxiously. He raised his hands and dropped them, and his face was stern. He said: ‘They’ve got Drusilla, of course. That was Stefan.’

Bruton did not speak; Mrs. Neilsen turned and walked away.

‘The old, old way,’ said Palfrey, with an effort. ‘If ever I start on a hunt again I’ll make a firm rule—never split up.’

‘Did Charles betray her?’ asked Bruton.

‘I don’t know. We’re waiting for Neilsen now, and meeting Stefan after dark.’ He went into the dining-room and looked out over the lake, where the first veils of dusk were falling; and he longed for darkness.

The end of the hunt was in sight now. The only question was what sacrifices would be demanded of them – of him – of Drusilla?

It was pitch dark.

Neilsen led them from the car, which he had pulled up in a side street near the Stortog, the old market-place, in the centre of Staden. The road was narrow and there were old houses on either side. They walked unnoticed along the crowded sidewalk. Neilsen led them down a narrow alley, where all was dark, down a flight of steps towards the channel between the north and south islands. Few people were here. They trod softly on the smooth

road, Palfrey gripping Neilsen's coat, Bruton close behind him. They could hear the gentle lapping of the water not far below them. The lighted bridge spanning the channel was crowded with people and traffic; they could hear the noise of the traffic and the rumble of voices, and yet close to them the silence seemed complete.

'Be careful here,' said Neilsen.

He led them down another flight of steps, and then along the bank of the channel, then up more steps, into a narrow street where houses overhung the water. Lights shone from a few of the windows, but there was no street lamp; Neilsen whispered that he had taken the lamp bulb away some time before.

He stopped outside a door and tapped.

It opened at once. They could see an old man silhouetted against a dim light. Neilsen spoke to him and he stood aside.

They entered a narrow hall, went up a flight of stairs, and then Neilsen opened another door, and a brighter light shone out, shone upon Stefan – and *Charles Lumsden.*

They sprang up.

'Palfrey, I'm *terribly* sorry,' Charles burst out, 'it's too ghastly for words.' He did not know when not to talk, and Palfrey smiled at him, understanding. 'And it was my damned fault!' cried Charles. 'If I hadn't trusted that accursed girl it would never have happened!'

Palfrey said: 'That's too much to say.'

'It isn't,' said Charles. 'If I hadn't trusted her, if I hadn't persuaded Drusilla to trust her, we would never have left Berlin. She told me that she knew Bane was in this business, that she was working against him; she told me that she could make sure that nothing went wrong, and—and we walked right into trouble. We went up to her room—we'd booked a room—and Bane and that kite Knudsen were in there, as well as Lozana—we didn't have a chance, Lozana and Knudsen were armed. We just walked right into it, and' – he clenched his hands and glared at Palfrey – 'Muriel, the slut, laughed. *Laughed!*'

'Now, steady,' said Palfrey. 'We've got the future to face not the past to brood over. Is Drusilla still at the *Splendor!*'

'As far as we know.' Neilsen said. 'My wife is watching, so are friends of mine. If she is seen to leave, we shall have news soon.'

'What can we *do!*' cried Charles. 'They let me go, knowing I would do nothing to risk 'Silla's life.'

Palfrey looked at Stefan. 'We'll find something we can do, it can't be hopeless yet. What happened to you?' There was no reproach in his voice, he just wanted to know.

Stefan said: 'It was cleverly done, Sap. We reached the hotel together, from the airport. Lozana was in the lounge. I saw him, and watched him. The others went upstairs to their room. Five minutes afterwards Bane came down and spoke to me—and told me the situation. He was brutally frank. He said that you knew the truth but hadn't proof of it. He staked Drusilla's

life against you and Corny giving yourselves up to him—but I have told you of that.'

Palfrey said: 'Doesn't he think I'll tell you what I know? Hasn't he given himself away? Does he think we will do nothing, even if we do give ourselves up? Does he think we'll let him get away with it?'

'He can only try,' said Stefan, 'he has no other chance. There is danger for him and the others as acute as for ourselves. He is relying on Knudsen's influence with the Government and with the police to discredit any report we make in Stockholm, and he does not think that we can get in touch with London.'

'Oh,' said Palfrey.

'And can we?' asked Stefan, softly.

Palfrey said: 'We can and we will. I've written a full report, in code. I posted it as soon as we left Neilsen's house—the post is the safest place. It was stamped for airmail, and will probably reach London by tomorrow, the next day at the latest. It's up to Brett to find the evidence, if we don't have a chance, and I think he will from the report.' He turned on Charles. 'Do you know about your brother Matthew?'

Charles said: 'Yes. The unspeakable *swine*!'

Palfrey laughed, without amusement. 'I think they had him pretty helpless, Charles. No time for bitterness. And I can see now why Brett was so secretive.' He laughed again, and in spite of his words there was a wealth of bitterness in his tone. 'A Lumsden was suspect. Your father put up the money with some eagerness, on condition that you could come with us. It looked as if he had planted a spy, didn't it?'

Charles said, stupidly: 'The Old Man wouldn't be in this foul business.'

'Probably not. Just a Lumsden—Matthew, as it turns out. Oh, Brett warned us to keep a careful watch on you, he couldn't have done much more than he did without telling us all the truth, but—oh, well. No time for brooding over the past—who said that? I did, didn't I?' He laughed again. 'What are we going to do? Sit back and wait for arrest?' When none of them answered, he went on: 'We've done pretty well. Raoul—Neil—and now Drusilla. I was a damned fool ever to bring her. I thought it was going to be a holiday chase, with perhaps a spot of bother here and there. We should have been told the truth!' he cried.

Stefan said: 'The Marquis hasn't failed us yet, Sap.'

'He has this time,' said Palfrey, abruptly. 'I—Hallo, what's that?'

'That' was a heavy knocking at the front door.

All of them stiffened, and Bruton put his hand to his pocket – he was never far from his gun. Neilsen looked towards the door, then raised a hand for silence, went out and hurried down the stairs. The door closed behind him. They heard him speaking in undertones, presumably to the man who had admitted them, and then the knocking came again, urgent and imperative.

Bruton said: 'This looks like it.'

'I do not believe that we have been betrayed,' said Stefan. 'Neilsen was

confident—'

He broke off, for there was an exclamation of surprise downstairs. The front door slammed. There were urgent voices, Neilsen's and a woman's – both speaking in English.

Charles looked stupidly at Palfrey.

'That—that's *Muriel!*'

Palfrey said: 'I don't think we'll have much time for Muriel.' He stood watching the door as footsteps sounded on the stairs, the girl's hurried and sharp, Neilsen's much heavier and more deliberate. Yet he reached the door first and opened it, and Muriel came in, breathless, bright-eyed; she was dressed in the black Persian coat and the fez fur hat.

She said: 'They will be here in ten minutes, Lozana and several others, and they are determined not to let you escape alive. You *must* get away.'

# Chapter Thirty-Three

## Muriel's Last Effort

Charles said in a harsh voice: 'Haven't we had enough of you?'

Muriel cried: 'You must get away. One of them followed Andromovitch, he returned and gave Lozana the address. They are waiting only until they are sure you and Charles are here and then they will raid the house.'

Palfrey said: 'You laughed when Drusilla walked into trouble, didn't you?'

'Of course I laughed! They still think I am working with them, I must keep up that pretence until it's all over. I must make Bane think that I am with him, not against him—although in Berlin I tried to tell you. I didn't go on, you were obviously determined to disbelieve me. I've managed to fool Bane for a year, I've kept up the pretence no matter what it cost. I even helped him and Dias at the *Splendor*—he was already suspicious—if I had not I think I would have betrayed myself. Now—if you stay here for another five minutes, none of you will get away alive. I might,' she added, and repeated: 'I might, if I can get away before they come.'

Palfrey said: 'You'd lead us out into an ambush, my dear. We have met you before, you know.'

She looked at him levelly. It was hard to believe evil of her, and there was a burning sincerity in her voice.

'Palfrey. I can't *make* you believe me, but I am on your side; my work was to find out the truth about Bane, and I have done that. Only today I reported to the United States Embassy, they'll have been on the radio telephone to Washington by now. I can't *make* you save your lives, but I can tell you that if you don't leave here—*now*—you'll never get out.'

Palfrey looked at Stefan. Charles burst out: 'She's lying again, she's done nothing but lie.'

Muriel said: 'Don't blame me for what happens, Palfrey. I have helped before. *I* managed to get van Doorn away.'

Palfrey remembered in a flash that van Doorn had said a girl had been with the men who released him. He said: 'Why was a man killed in his place?'

'Because they hoped to make the police believe it was another terrorist crime,' she said. 'They thought van Doorn knew more than he did. But you're wasting time!'

'Perhaps. Why did they kill Laander?'

'He had a token—one with a cleft in the chin—and had worked with them. He learned how big it was and planned to leave them. They named him to you, hoping you would concentrate on him. They wanted to frame you for his murder. They murdered von Kriess because he suspected the truth … They killed Garon in Paris by inciting the mob because he had discovered too much about them. They drove Midaut to suicide, and they'll

kill all of you if you don't leave now!'

She turned and walked towards the door. Neilsen put out his hand to stop her. Palfrey shook his head. She went on to the landing, did not turn round again, but went slowly down the stairs. Charles cried: 'Palfrey, have you gone mad?'

'Let's get out,' said Palfrey. 'We're prepared for trouble, it's the only way we can find out the truth.'

He led the way, ignoring a protesting Charles, while Stefan rebuked Charles sharply. They filed down the stairs amid a hush that could be felt. Muriel was in the narrow hall, with the old man beside her, both illuminated by the light from the upstairs room.

Neilsen hurried back and switched the light off. He spoke to the old man, who opened the street door. Muriel went out first. She did not turn or run in either direction, but walked steadily towards the water channel. The others followed her into the darkness, making little noise. They could just see Muriel's head and shoulders against the faint glow of light which came from the bridge, that bridge where the traffic crossed and the people walked, preoccupied with their troubles and absorbed in their pleasures.

Neilsen caught up with the girl.

'This way,' he whispered.

He took them past a narrow turning which led to a lighted street, and for a moment they could see one another; then they were enshrouded in the gloom again. Neilsen had taken them to a courtyard in front of a tall house from which no light came. They were fifty yards from the house where they had taken refuge.

They waited in breathless silence.

Charles broke it. 'I don't trust her, Palfrey.'

'Quiet!' hissed Neilsen.

His quick ears had picked out fresh sounds, and soon they heard footfalls, those of a small party of men, stealthy and soft but nevertheless audible. Several men appeared at the end of the narrow road; the lights from the distant street just revealed the figures.

'One—two—three—four—' murmured Stefan.

'Hush!' said Neilsen.

'Five—six—seven—eight,' murmured Palfrey, under his breath. He was so intent on the men that he no longer looked at Muriel. He could hear her hushed breathing, and a faint perfume floated towards him.

The eight men disappeared from sight but were still audible. There were other sounds besides footsteps – the murmur of low-pitched voices. Then, blasting the quiet, came the roar of an explosion and a vivid yellow flash, in which the crouching figures of men taking cover in doorways and behind stone posts were revealed. The flash and the sound had hardly died away before the men leapt from their cover and rushed into the house. Torchlights were shining, and they could see the broken doorway and the shattered windows.

Palfrey touched Neilsen's arm.

'The old man?' he said.

'Safe,' said Neilsen.

'Let's go,' said Palfrey, and they turned and followed Neilsen along the narrow roads, most of the time in darkness but sometimes in the light from a window or a street lamp. All the time they could hear the traffic on the great bridge and the tapping of hurrying footsteps. Neilsen led them up a steep bank and then, for the first time since they had met together, into a main street. They crossed the bridge and reached the security of the far side. They walked across the great crowded and well-lit square, past the Royal Theatre and the Royal Opera House, past the statue of King Gustav in the centre of the square, along a broad thoroughfare where traffic clanged, until they came to the quiet of an open space, gardens which were unlighted and where there seemed hardly an echo of the city noises.

'We shall be safe here for a while,' said Neilsen, as he drew them under the tall trees, where it was pitch dark, 'but we must not stay too long.'

Palfrey looked at Muriel, just able to see the pale shape of her face.

She said: 'Do you trust me now?'

'Yes,' said Palfrey, 'I trust you.'

The little party was silent after Palfrey's words. Charles gripped Palfrey's arm, as if to warn him not to be taken in; Neilsen drew in his breath; Stefan, by Palfrey's side, was staring at the girl. As they stood there a car siren sounded stridently, and was followed by the roar of a fire-engine and the clanging of its bell. They could not see the fire at the little house across the canal, but had no doubt that the fire-engine was on its way there.

Then Muriel said: 'I think I can save your wife.'

Charles's grip tightened so much that it was painful. He was still unconvinced, and Palfrey admitted to himself that this might be a clever ruse to win their confidence and then betray them. He would not commit himself, but he knew one thing: the *only* chance of saving Drusilla was through this girl.

'How?' he asked.

'They have taken her to Knudsen's house, at Carlberg. That is on the outskirts of the city,' she added. 'It is a big house, where he feels quite safe. There are cellars, and any number of people can hide there.'

'And they'll just open the door for us, I suppose?' sneered Charles.

'Steady,' said Palfrey. Then to Muriel: 'Do you know who else is there?'

'All of them,' said Muriel. 'Bane, Dias, Knudsen and Lozana. They will probably know by now that you weren't caught.' She turned and took a step forward, facing Charles. 'I can open the front door for you, if you let me go now,' she said.

'It would be crazy!' Charles flung at her.

'I don't see what else we can do,' said Palfrey, mildly.

'She'll trap us all!'

'Do not *shout,*' warned Neilsen, 'we do not want to attract attention. *Please* do not shout.'

‘What is Knudsen’s address?’ asked Palfrey, warily.

‘He is at Carlberg,’ she said.

So she was telling some of the truth.

‘I know the house,’ Neilsen said, ‘it is well known, one of the finest in the suburbs.’

Palfrey said to Muriel: ‘You’d better hurry.’

She stood quite still for a moment, then put out a hand impulsively, and squeezed his. ‘I’ll see *you* later,’ she murmured to Charles, with a hint of laughter in her voice. Then she walked off, and they saw her turn into the main road, trim, neat, walking with easy grace; they watched her until she was out of sight.

‘It’s absolutely asking for trouble,’ said Charles.

‘Oh, my dear chap,’ said Palfrey, ‘it’s our only chance, and we needn’t take her at her word, you know. She said that she sent a report to the United States Embassy, and Corny can check that up for us. Our first job,’ he added.

‘He’s wanted by the police,’ said Charles.

‘We’ve got to take some chances,’ said Palfrey. ‘How far are we from the Embassy, Neilsen?’

‘Not very far.’

‘We’d better walk in ones and twos,’ said Palfrey. ‘Stefan and Charles together, Corny with me, you a yard or two ahead, Neilsen. If Corny and I have a bad break and the police recognise us, the rest of you can go on to the Embassy. You know what we want—to make sure the Embassy people convince the Stockholm police that Knudsen is holding Drusilla against her will. Don’t go further than that, let the roguery be found out as a bonus.’ He sounded almost elated. ‘Lead on, Neilsen!’

They did not seem to be noticed as they slipped out of the little park. Neilsen murmured that he would lead them the long way round, where they could avoid the better-lighted main thoroughfare. They stood on the pavement for a moment, in a bunch – and suddenly police swooped upon them; there was not-a chance for them to break away, for the police were armed. It was over before they realised it had begun.

Charles gasped: ‘*Muriel, the—*’

‘Hush!’ said Palfrey. ‘And don’t struggle!’

His words were mechanical. He knew that struggling was useless, too many police had gathered about the little park. They must have been followed by a policeman from the bridge, recognised, and allowed to go into hiding until he could bring reinforcements.

A heavily built man seemed to be the leader of the police. He kept a hand on Stefan, although had Stefan fought he could have smashed the man; but there were too many guns to give them a chance of flight.

Cars drew up alongside them.

Neilsen was protesting, but getting little response from his captors. A crowd gathered to watch them, the inevitable curious crowd. They were hustled into the cars and driven along the brightly lit roads. Palfrey, who sat

with his eyes closed, and Bruton were together in one car, Stefan in a second, Charles and Neilsen in a third. The cars had right of way and drove fast, until they pulled up at last outside the police headquarters.

Palfrey opened his eyes.

There was something surprising about the attitude of the police, and only as they climbed from the cars did he realise what it was: they had not been handcuffed. It was surprising that, with such desperadoes as they were doubtless supposed to be, that precaution had not been taken. The revolvers might explain that, and yet it continued to puzzle him. He harped on it deliberately, for it stopped him from thinking of Drusilla. No matter how he talked, no matter how he tried to persuade the police that Drusilla was held at Knudsen's house in Carlberg, he would not be able to convince them. Even if they instigated a search there was no guarantee that they would find her. Muriel might have lied altogether; Drusilla might still be at the *Splendor*.

He was surprised, when he entered the big modern building, to see two men in British Army uniform. They stared at him blankly. He was led upstairs, and the others followed in single file, with police crowding the stairs behind them. It was almost a ceremonial procession.

A door on the right of the landing was open, and the light streamed out. Palfrey turned into the room at a word from the big policeman, and as he entered, narrowing his eyes against the glare, he heard a deep-throated laugh. It was a familiar laugh, coming from the depths of the man's chest.

He stared in astonishment at General Zukkor, who came towards him with both hands outstretched.

'Welcome, my dear Doctor!' Palfrey gaped.

'You are surprised, my friend, but you should not be,' said Zukkor; 'we do not allow great risks with such men as you. Ah! Stefan Andromovitch, my friend! And Charles. And Corny Bruton!' He pumped their hands. '*Now,*' he cried, 'we can take action, perhaps with the help of our good friends the Swedish police. Action against Nazi agents who have taken refuge in this country and proceeded to commit crimes of violence! Where are they, Palfrey? And where is your wife?' Palfrey said, '*Is* this real?' Zukkor roared with laughter.

'It is as real as the dinner at Berlin, my friend. Why should it not be? Why should I not come to see my friends the Swedish authorities? Often I have spent holidays in Sweden, I love this city, and I could not spend holidays in Germany. Did Brett not tell you that? Now, now, recover from your surprise, tell me what you can. Already it is suspected that the American Bane, the man Dias and the Swede Knudsen are together in this bad business—yes, even Knudsen. Ask my friend the Chief of Police.' He turned and waved his hand towards another man, standing behind a large desk and smiling. Palfrey had been so astounded that he had not seen him before. 'That is so,' said the Swede. 'But how did you know?' demanded Palfrey. Zukkor chuckled. 'The little American woman who is so charming—Muriel, is it not? She sent word to the United States Embassy, and immediately we were

telephoned in Berlin, because it was of some importance. I flew here at once and—but come, my friend. Tell us what you know.'

Palfrey said: 'I know that my wife is at Knudsen's house in Carlberg, and that Muriel has gone there.' Zukkor snapped: 'Muriel, *there!*' 'Why not?' demanded Palfrey.

'Because she is known now as an enemy of Bane,' said Zukkor, suddenly harsh. 'There was the affair near the North Bridge, a man was caught, he has confessed—confessed much. He was watching the house and saw this Muriel, afterwards saw her leave with you. He told others, who have escaped to warn Bane and Knudsen, so they will know. We must lose no time.' Palfrey said: 'Don't be too hasty, General.' The words sounded trite, but they made Zukkor wait with impatient expectancy. 'I think I'd better go ahead,' said Palfrey. 'They may know she betrayed them, they aren't likely to know that the police are against them. A private visit is indicated—don't you think?'

'I do not understand you,' said Zukkor. 'There is danger enough for your wife and the girl. Indeed there is! Why should you make danger for yourself, also?'

'To learn more,' said Palfrey. 'Bruton and I, they believe, are still wanted for murder. We will not, therefore, dare to approach the police. We will be likely to attempt a rescue on our own, perhaps with a few friends such as Neilsen. And of course we will be caught. Bane and Knudsen will waste no time, I think, but Dias will gloat—and talk. We may learn everything, and we don't know everything yet.'

Zukkor growled: 'I do not like it, Doctor. I was requested by the Marquis of Brett to make sure that you were not hurt. And yet there is much in what you say.' He turned to the Chief of Police and spoke rapidly in Swedish. 'Will it be possible to surround the house without being seen, and so allow the Doctor some time inside?'

'Yes,' said the Chief of Police, briefly.

Zukkor clapped his hands together.

'Then go, my friends!' He smiled at Palfrey, Stefan and Bruton, and then looked a little uncertainly at Charles.

'I'm in this,' said Charles, briskly.

# Chapter Thirty-Four

## Señor Dias is Triumphant

'How do we start?' whispered Charles.

'We break in,' said Bruton, laconically.

They were in the grounds of Knudsen's house, which was in complete darkness. Clouds had blown up during the last hour and the stars were obscured. There was rain in the wind, and it was bitterly cold.

They had left police headquarters two hours before and driven to within a short distance of the house. There they had left the car, and walked in single file up the hill to the front gates and along the drive, in silence but for the wind; Neilsen was with them; he had refused to withdraw at this stage, and alternating with his mental pictures of Drusilla Palfrey raw his own wife in his mind's eye. He could picture her in that charming house, waiting by the telephone …

The police had surrounded Knudsen's house. None was nearer than two hundred yards, and they were to close in after an hour, or whenever there was an earlier summons.

In spite of the darkness Palfrey could tell the lie of the land. Great pines towered above the roof-tops, the grounds were filled with shrubberies, and there was a belt of trees surrounding the house; there was no easier place to approach without being seen.

Was the house guarded?

Palfrey had little doubt that it was, but questioned whether there would be guards posted outside the grounds. That ring of trees afforded ample cover, and since the house was on a hill quick warning could be sent to the men inside.

Their footsteps made little sound on the smooth drive. At first they groped their way forward step by step, but as they drew nearer to the house they saw chinks of light at the sides of the windows, and grew more accustomed to the darkness. The sighing of the wind was in their ears all the time, and drowned all other sounds. Now and again Palfrey, who was immediately behind Neilsen, thought he saw a shadowy figure flit across their path, or walk alongside them. There was the possibility of a sudden outbreak of shooting, and the tension rose with every step they took.

Neilsen touched Palfrey's hand. In turn Palfrey touched Stefan's and the warning gesture was passed back to Bruton, who brought up the rear. They were close to the steps which led to the front door, and also to a path surrounding the house. Neilsen groped forward for the bottom step. They went up slowly, reached the path, and saw a lighted window, a little to their left.

They walked past it, able to move more freely, for up here the wind was boisterous, and they could hear it whistling noisily through the pines.

Neilsen stopped again. They were by the window of an unlighted room.

Their plans had been laid with great care. Bruton, the expert at forcing doors and opening windows, came to the front and explored, using the pencil torch. The thin beam of light seemed very bright. He took a long time, but at last they heard the click of the latch—the windows were of the sashcord type. They stopped, listening breathlessly; it was hard to realise that they *wanted* to be caught. Palfrey's heart was thumping as he waited and before it had settled down Bruton said: 'Okay, Sap.'

He pushed the window up. There was little noise, only a squeak when it started to move. Then Bruton shone the torch inside. There was a chair standing with its back to the window. He pushed it gently to one side, and it scraped on wooden boards. They paused again, but there was no indication that they had been heard.

Bruton climbed through.

They followed him one after the other, and then Bruton closed the window and walked across the room, guided by the light of his torch. It was eerie and unnerving. Any moment the door might burst open and they might be attacked, but the silence remained unbroken. Except for the evidence of the lighted rooms they would have thought the house was empty.

The door creaked; there was a dim light in the passage beyond. Bruton stepped through it, Palfrey followed, and they went towards the more shadowy part of the long, L-shaped hall.

Lights flashed on!

There seemed to be a dozen of them, at their side and above their heads – bright dazzling lights which blinded them, and even had they wanted to escape detection they would not have had a chance. As they stood there, trying to see against that dazzling brilliance, men appeared on the stairs, in the front hall and on either side, through doorways which had been in darkness.

And there, by the foot of the stairs, was Señor Fernandez y Dias, with Lozana near him. On the stairs behind him were Bane and Knudsen. Bane was grinning, Knudsen smiling broadly, and Dias seemed beside himself with delight. His hands were raised as if he were giving them his blessing, his eyes shone, even his cheeks were glowing.

'My dear Dr. Palfrey, how welcome! How good of you to come so far to seek me out. And to bring your friends—how *very* gracious of you! Perhaps now you will be prepared to go on that most comfortable journey to the wife of the President?'

Palfrey did not speak.

'Come, my friend,' said Dias, advancing a step, 'surely you are not *surprised* to see me here? Nor to find us waiting for you? Have you ever reflected, my dear doctor, on the psychology of races? The English and the North American have remarkably similar traits—remarkably similar. They can be relied on always to make great sacrifices for the sake of their ladies! We expected you, my friend. Our invitation could hardly have been written more plainly.'

‘I see,’ said Palfrey.

‘And although the younger woman is reluctant to speak,’ Dias went on, ‘your good friend, your *so* good friend, Muriel, doubtless promised you help when you arrived. Unhappily for you, we learned in time that she was, after all, not so loyal as we had hoped. You see, we had to force admission from her.’

He pointed towards an open door.

Palfrey turned, and the others looked in the same direction. There was a bright light in the room, and sitting just inside the doorway was Muriel. They hardly recognised her. She was strapped to a chair, her clothes were torn, her bare shoulders were criss-crossed with weals, her face was deathly white and her eyes were glassy with pain. They had not touched her face, but there was blood on the back of one of her hands.

Palfrey said heavily: ‘The old tricks, Dias.’

‘I am happy to tell you that in my country many of these tricks, as you call them, were originated,’ said Dias. ‘You should be glad, Dr. Palfrey, that we have not treated your wife in the same way. She was not a traitor. But come—you will be most anxious to see her!’ He led the way towards the room, and as he passed Muriel he slapped her face sharply.

‘Why you—’ cried Charles.

He was the first of the party to move, and he went like an arrow from a bow towards Dias. Lozana shouted a warning, Palfrey and Stefan jumped forward to try to save him – but a shot rang out, and before he reached Dias Charles threw up his hands, then fell forward. As he fell his arms hit Muriel’s knees; he did not fall to the floor but was supported by her, as if he were kneeling before her, begging her forgiveness.

Bane said: ‘Be careful, Palfrey.’

Palfrey ignored him, and was allowed to go to Charles and raise him up. Charles was conscious, and in a moment or two Palfrey found that the bullet had entered the fleshy part of his waist, and there was no danger. Stefan lifted him, carried him into the room and put him on a couch.

Dias had gone in first and Lozana and the other men followed, all showing their guns.

Drusilla was sitting in an easy chair in one corner of the room. She was not tied to it, and half rose as Palfrey appeared, but Dias said: ‘Keep still, Mrs. Palfrey, keep still.’

She sank back. Palfrey looked across at her, and wondered desperately how he could send her a message of reassurance – and whether, in fact, such a message was justified. This show of strength proved that Dias was taking no chances. Even when the police came it was not likely that many of those present would escape alive.

Palfrey bent over Charles.

‘Leave him,’ said Dias.

Palfrey ignored the command, and Knudsen strode forward, gripped Palfrey’s arm and swung him round. The Swede was still smiling; Palfrey wondered what he had ever seen in the man to remind him of Erikson.

‘Do as you’re told,’ Knudsen said.

‘I do not think that Dr. Palfrey and his friends are in a good temper,’ purred Dias. ‘And it would, perhaps, be wise not to allow them to cause a further disturbance.’

What followed was obviously prearranged. Lozana struck Bruton, who was standing near him, with the butt end of his gun. Another man struck Neilsen. Charles was out of action in any case – only Stefan and Palfrey remained, and for a moment it looked as if Stefan’s size was holding the men back from striking him. Then suddenly Knudsen kicked at his legs, Lozana sprang forward, a third man brought the butt of his gun heavily down on the back of Stefan’s head. It was all done so quickly and with such ruthless precision that Palfrey, sick with anger, knew that Stefan had really had no chance.

Dias said: ‘Take them out.’

So he was not to be a victim yet, thought Palfrey.

He stood watching as they carried the unconscious men out – one struck Charles savagely when Charles lashed out with his fists – and when they had gone, three men carrying Stefan, Palfrey and Drusilla remained in the room with Dias, Bane, Lozana and Knudsen.

Muriel was there, too, pushed into a corner with her back to the others, her head lolling forward on her chest.

Palfrey said: ‘What good do you think this will do you?’

Dias rapped: ‘Much good! And I will have no insolence from you, Palfrey. Understand me. None of you will remain alive. It has all been planned, most carefully planned. *None* of you will live, and what I intend to learn from you is simple: have you sent reports to London?’ He strode forward and gripped Palfrey’s throat, and there was surprising strength in those podgy fingers ‘*Have you told London?*’

Palfrey said: ‘Yes. My report was posted.’

Dias released his hold and stepped back, startled, not expecting that prompt affirmative.

Bane laughed harshly. ‘Nothing can be proved.’

‘There was never a chance that you would get away with it,’ said Palfrey. ‘Never a remote chance.’ *Could* he goad them into talking?

‘You are wrong, Palfrey,’ said Dias, but he looked at Palfrey uneasily, as if his confidence had been shaken. ‘You are quite wrong, Palfrey.’

‘Of course he’s wrong,’ said Bane.

Dias said: ‘We have protected ourselves well, Palfrey. You were sent to spy on us, the girl Muriel to spy on Bane, but we have protected ourselves *very* well. Bane, you see, will return to Washington and will report. *He* is not the leader, oh no! *He* has been doing the work which he volunteered to do, and what has he learned? Much, Palfrey! The woman Muriel betrayed her country, worked with rogues to the damnation of Europe—*she* did that, Palfrey. And who were the rogues? I ask you, *who* were they?’

Palfrey said nothing.

There was a glint in Dias’s eyes now; his disquiet was all gone, he was

carried away by his own oratory, by his triumph, by his gloating satisfaction.

Bane and Knudsen stood either side of him. Palfrey did not doubt that they were confident now, they believed that they had produced a satisfactory answer to every accusation. In his heart. Palfrey was afraid that they had …

'One of them was the Englishman, *Anderson,*' said Dias, gently now. 'A great Englishman who loved money above all else, and who hated Russia. He would work for the downfall of unity among the great nations.' He sneered the words again. 'The *great* nations! How best could that unity be disrupted, Palfrey? By spreading hunger and illness and discontent – hunger, illness, discontent! You fool!' he cried. 'You and the leaders of your country, of Russia, of America—you fools! To think that you could win, to think that when the fighting stopped in Europe you would be allowed to win! *No,* Palfrey! The second battle is on! Hunger and starvation, a Europe devastated by illness, sickness which cannot be checked because the medical supplies are not available in quantities enough. You seek radium—you will never find it, it was taken from the hospitals, it was hidden where no man will ever find it, but that was only one small step, one *very* small step, Palfrey, one of dozens which we are taking. Black Market is another, a greater one. Shiploads of food go to those markets, shiploads of medical supplies founder. Europe is rife with intrigue, and that intrigue will get worse; distrust will spread among the three *great* nations of the world—distrust—enmity—hatred—and the future war will destroy your nations and destroy the flower of your manhood, this time beyond all hope of recovery, beyond all hope. Do you hear me, Palfrey? Do you hear me?'

Palfrey said: 'Yes, Dias.'

The man's voice dropped. 'You will be wise to listen well, you will not hear these words again. All this, *all* this we have done, the breaking down of the economy of the smaller countries through the Black Market, the spread of disease which cannot be arrested because of starvation and the lack of drugs—like the disappearance of your precious radium; even tonight the destruction of—'

Bane said: 'Why tell him everything, Dias?'

Dias roared: 'It will be good to see the horror in his eyes when he knows all the truth, when he sees, before he dies, the conflagration of a world disintegrated by atomic forces, when he realises that all he has done and others have done to end war is wasted effort, wasted, thrown away, because —because *some* men are loyal to an ideal!'

Bane spoke again. 'He knows plenty now. There's only a little more he has to know. You've named me, Palfrey. I shall name Anderson. That's the trouble with Josh, he was always an easy man to handle. *He* turned against me, Palfrey, when he saw what I was planning with Dias, so I dealt with him. You fell for that one. He'll live—oh, he'll live, but he'll have no mind to think with, he'll be trained what to say. And he will say that he organised these shipments, naming men in America and England who had nothing to

do with it. There will be a scandal like nothing you've known. Surely,' he added, speaking in a low-pitched drawling voice, 'it will be some scandal, Palfrey. Big names brought down, competitors of mine—not bad! And for a while our shipments will stop, and Europe won't get over *this* coming winter. It will be the worst on record. The work's done. Palfrey, and you couldn't stop us.'

Palfrey said: 'You're lying.'

'You think so?' said Bane. 'Maybe there is a little more to finish off, but not so much. We have agents in every city and town. Maybe you would call them Nazi agents, and you would not be all that wrong. Black Market won't be stopped this winter, and by next summer we shall start work again.'

Palfrey said: 'Where did Knudsen come in in this?'

Bane laughed. 'Knudsen has worked with me for a long time, he's our chief European agent. He can control the movement of ships, he can glut one market with fish and starve another. Dias didn't know that he was working with us—'

Dias clapped his hands impatiently, as if annoyed that the spotlight had been taken away from him.

'That was of no account. It was that I believed Knudsen was against us, and listed him.'

'Like Garon, von Kriess, Midaut and others,' said Palfrey, heavily.

'Yes, like those,' said Dias. 'They would have worked against us, they were powerful, and we ruined them, as we shall ruin all who stand in our way. It is well done, Palfrey—and *why?* Do you know why? Because we know that the Bolshevik hordes will descend upon Europe unless their country is ravaged by plagues and starvation, as it will be when we have finished. There will be no hope for Russia, no hope, no hope …'

There was froth at his mouth, his eyes were blazing, he was like a man possessed; and in truth he was demented. Even Bane was tainted with the madness.

Bane said: 'Now you've got it, Palfrey. If the damned fools in Washington and London had made way for Hitler, we would have been saved a lot of trouble.'

'Just another beer-cellar gang,' said Palfrey, and he drew his hand across his forehead, as if he were too weary to think. 'Just another, starting afresh.'

Knudsen snapped: 'It has never ended! All of us were loyal to the Leader. We can tell you where your missing war criminals—criminals you dare call them!—are hidden; we can tell you where the men are working today, in Europe, in Germany, in Asia, to keep alive the eternal spirit of the Third Reich—'

Palfrey said: 'You're a very patriotic Swede, Knudsen. And all of you are in this for money—and power. Money and power.'

'I am a German!' Knudsen snapped. 'I took Swedish nationality many years ago, working for the Great Day.'

'*Der Tag* again,' said Palfrey. 'Oh, you fools!' He looked across the room at Drusilla, and he was smiling. He walked across the room and they did

nothing to stop him. He stood by her, looking down. She peered up at him with a strained face, but as she saw the smile in his eyes she grew easier, hope dawned again. 'It's all right,' he said. 'They won't get away with it.'

Dias moved swiftly towards him, grabbed his shoulder and swung him round. 'We have detailed information to produce against men who are innocent but can be proved guilty! We have our agents so well placed that there will be no danger.'

Palfrey looked into his face – and laughed.

He did not think that he and Drusilla would get away. He even wondered if these men could succeed in their great bluff. If he could make them uncertain of themselves it would be a help. If he could make them think that there was more that he could tell them, and they questioned him, as they had questioned Muriel, he might win time, might just win through.

He looked at the clock on the mantelpiece; the hour was nearly up, but was there even a chance that the men in the house would be taken by surprise?

Bane said: 'You know something, Palfrey. Talk right now. If you don't—' He swung round and pointed towards Muriel, and Lozana stepped towards her and pulled her chair round. 'That's an idea of what will happen to you —'

*Then the window crashed in.*

There was no warning. Just the crash, and then the billowing curtains and the voices of men. Palfrey shot out a hand and struck Dias across the face, kicked out at Bane – and did not need to act again, for men streamed in at the window, and all danger was over.

'It was well done, my friend,' said Zukkor. 'I knew that we could rely on the police, they are our very good friends. What Knudsen did not know is that he has long been suspected, and the positions of his men in the grounds were known, they were overcome with ease. And some of us were listening outside, Palfrey, it was well done.'

He beamed about him, at Palfrey, Drusilla, Stefan and Bruton, all unhurt. Neilsen had a flesh wound; Charles, his wound now dressed, was in an upstairs room where Muriel's wounds were being tended – a distraught Charles, who could not apologise to her enough. Bane, Dias and Lozana had been taken unhurt, but Knudsen was wounded in the chest, and was in the hall waiting to be taken to the Serafimer Hospital. There had been little talk, but the raid had been a complete success.

Zukkor said: 'A south American who has always been a member of the Bund, an American with hatred for the Soviet Union because he is half German, an Englishman in the man Lumsden, a Swede in Knudsen—no matter what he says he is a Swede. And when we have finished it all, there will be men from other countries, perhaps from Russia—we too have our traitors—there are still Trotskyites and Tsarists. But so few from each country, Palfrey, so few who could have done so great a harm.'

'Yes,' said Palfrey. 'They have done plenty. Are all the records here?'

‘Dias is a man of jelly,’ said Zukkor, scornfully; ‘he is talking very fast, my friend, we shall know all the men who are guilty before this night is out. You are worried still, I see, but there is no need to worry.’

‘There is,’ said Palfrey.

‘The radium will be found,’ said Zukkor, ‘have no fear of that; we shall find everything.’

‘I hope so,’ said Palfrey. He stood with his hand pulling at the short hairs in front of his head, frowning. ‘There was something Dias started to say but did not finish. The destruction of something or other tonight. I wish I knew what.’

‘Dias will tell us,’ Zukkor said confidently.

‘Perhaps. He—’

Palfrey broke off, for there was a sudden hubbub in the hall. Knudsen began shouting at the top of his voice.

‘I will not go! I will not go there—not there—do not take me there, not there—’ He went on and on, in a frenzy of fear.

Zukkor moved into the hall, and Palfrey followed him quickly. ‘Where is he going?’ asked Zukkor of the ambulance men who had lifted him.

‘To the Serafimer Hospital,’ the man said.

‘No,’ screamed Knudsen, ‘no, I will not go—I will not go!’ He tried to throw himself off the stretcher, and it took two men to hold him down. ‘I will not—I will not!’

Palfrey reached his side and looked down at him, his eyes bleak, an expression on his face which made the others stand and watch him.

‘Why won’t you go?’ he demanded, and when Knudsen stared at him in mute fear he gripped his throat and said: ‘*Why won’t you go?* Zukkor, give me a knife!’

‘No!’ screamed Knudsen. ‘It is to be destroyed by fire, like the others, like the others—it will start tonight—’

‘So that’s it,’ said Palfrey, urgently. ‘Work for the police, arson at the Serafimer Hospital; *arson* destroyed the other hospitals. Zukkor—’

But Zukkor was already outside, shouting, and the Chief of Police was already at the telephone.

It was a fortnight before Palfrey reached London. The truth was widely known; the world’s Press had told the whole infamous story, arrests by the hundred had been made throughout Europe. Pressure was being brought to bear on the Castilian Government. In the United States F.B.I, men were investigating all of Bane’s affairs; in London Scotland Yard experts were going through Josh Anderson’s records, Anderson was alive, and had told the truth, he had started as a partner, grown sick of it, threatened to disclose the truth, and been promptly dealt with.

It was known that there had been suspicions of Bane, but Muriel—her name *was* Muriel Corliss—had been assigned to the case. She had been approached by Dias at first, but until she had reached Stockholm she had not been sure of Bane’s real activities.

Muriel and Charles were recuperating in a Swiss mountain village.

Deep beneath the cellars at Knudsen's house the radium had been found, and Palfrey had called at Rotterdam and seen van Doorn and Anna, a new Anna, a happy van Doorn. It was known now that von Kriess had suspected much of what was planned, had told van Doorn about the radium, believing it would lead to greater disclosures; so there was a German who had helped.

Food distribution was better now than it had ever been. The Governments of Europe had received a salutary shock, there was no more procrastination. The police struck hard, and although there were still some Black Market operations, they were on a scale which could be closely watched and would be reduced and finally stamped out.

Stefan was in Moscow, reporting; Bruton was in Washington. Neilsen, his wound on the mend, was with his wife.

Palfrey and Drusilla, travel-weary but reasonably content, had an evening alone at the flat and were not disturbed either by the telephone or by visitors. Next morning they went to Brierly Place and were made much of by Christian, who told them that the Marquis was in his room, expecting them. Brett stood up behind the desk as they entered. They shook hands warmly, then sat down, and Brett looked at Palfrey with a quizzical smile.

'All but one thing settled, Sap. Isn't that so?'

'One large thing,' said Palfrey, twisting his hair about his forefinger; it had grown long enough now. 'Never before have I been completely mystified by you, Marquis. This time I'm stumped. I can understand why we were allowed to go unofficially, but I can't understand why you didn't tell us what you really hoped would turn up. And I can't understand why you planted Charles Lumsden on us. Oh, he made good, but—the viper in the Lumsden family bosom might have been him, not Matthew.' He paused. 'You knew it was one of the Lumsdens, didn't you?'

'Not until later, when I warned you,' said Brett, 'and then only because I found that old Lumsden had some dealings with Bane and Anderson. I feared that was why he was so eager to put up the money, so that he could pass on to his colleagues what plans you had in mind. Your plans concerned radium; against the larger issues that did not greatly matter. We, as a country, had pledged ourselves not to interfere with internal affairs of liberated countries. Charles Lumsden, being attached to you, would have had to know the whole truth, you could not have kept him in ignorance. Moscow and Washington were not prepared to let you know, as he was with you. I had no choice, but I gave you plenty of hints!'

'Oh yes,' said Palfrey, much happier in his mind.

'There were other reasons for secrecy,' went on Brett. 'The smaller countries, troubled as they were, *were* beginning to get suspicious of the motives of the Big Three. Had there been even a rumour that you were investigating domestic matters *for* the Big Three, there would have been a diplomatic crisis of the first order. It had *to* be avoided. We took extravagant precautions, and just as soon as we were able to give you official support, we did.' He paused, then went on gravely: 'In the papers found in Knudsen's

house was a report from an official in London giving a detailed statement of your plans, of the trouble you have taken to get unofficial approval. That was established, and it served its purpose. They had no suspicions that you were on a special mission, because you weren't.'

'Charles was the trouble,' said Palfrey. 'Yes, I forgive you. But the outlook isn't good. Days of peace, and diplomats on the rampage again. Caution carried to excess, but you couldn't help it. And we *did* get through.' He looked across at Drusilla. 'Satisfied, my darling?'

'Yes,' said Drusilla, with her gentle smile.

'It proves one thing,' said Palfrey: 'there's a lot to be done before we get rid of all distrust among the nations. We're thinking of going to Rotterdam, for a start, and helping to organise relief work. Any approval needed?'

'None,' said the Marquis, 'and you won't lack help.'

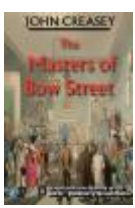
# Series Information

*Published or to be published by*
*House of Stratus*

*Dates given are those of first publication*
*Alternative titles in brackets*

*'The Baron' (47 titles) (writing as Anthony Morton)*
*'Department 'Z'' (28 titles)*
*'Dr. Palfrey Novels' (34 titles)*
*'Gideon of Scotland Yard' (22 titles)*
*'Inspector West' (43 titles)*
*'Sexton Blake' (5 titles)*
*'The Toff' (59 titles)*

*along with:*




***The Masters of Bow Street***
This epic novel embraces the story of the Bow Street Runners and the Marine Police, forerunners of the modern police force, who were founded by novelist Henry Fielding in 1748. They were the earliest detective force operating from the courts to enforce the decisions of magistrates. John Creasey's account also gives a fascinating insight into family life of the time and the struggle between crime and justice, and ends with the establishment of the Metropolitan Police after the passing of Peel's Act in 1829.

## 'The Baron' Series

*These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels*

1. Meet the Baron *(The Man in the Blue Mask) (1937)*
2. The Baron Returns *(The Return of the Blue Mask) (1937)*

3. The Baron Again *(Salute Blue Mask) (1938)*
4. The Baron at Bay *(Blue Mask at Bay) (1938)*
5. Alias the Baron *(Alias Blue Mask) (1939)*
6. The Baron at Large *(Challenge Blue Mask!) (1939)*
7. Versus the Baron *(Blue Mask Strikes Again) (1940)*
8. Call for the Baron *(Blue Mask Victorious) (1940)*
9. The Baron Comes Back *(1943)*
10. A Case for the Baron *(1945)*
11. Reward for the Baron *(1945)*
12. Career for the Baron *(1946)*
13. Blood Diamond *(The Baron and the Beggar) (1947)*
14. Blame the Baron *(1948)*
15. A Rope for the Baron *(1948)*
16. Books for the Baron *(1949)*
17. Cry for the Baron *(1950)*
18. Trap the Baron *(1950)*
19. Attack the Baron *(1951)*
20. Shadow the Baron *(1951)*
21. Warn the Baron *(1952)*
22. The Baron Goes East *(1953)*
23. The Baron in France *(1953)*
24. Danger for the Baron *(1953)*
25. The Baron Goes Fast *(1954)*
26. Nest-Egg for the Baron *(Deaf, Dumb and Blonde) (1954)*
27. Help from the Baron *(1955)*
28. Hide the Baron *(1956)*
29. The Double Frame *(Frame the Baron) (1957)*
30. Blood Red *(Red Eye for the Baron) (1958)*
31. If Anything Happens to Hester *(Black for the Baron) (1959)*
32. Salute for the Baron *(1960)*
33. The Baron Branches Out *(A Branch for the Baron) (1961)*
34. The Baron and the Stolen Legacy *(Bad for the Baron) (1962)*
35. A Sword for the Baron *(The Baron and the Mogul Swords) (1963)*
36. The Baron on Board *(The Mask of Sumi) (1964)*
37. The Baron and the Chinese Puzzle *(1964)*
38. Sport for the Baron *(1966)*
39. Affair for the Baron *(1967)*
40. The Baron and the Missing Old Masters *(1968)*
41. The Baron and the Unfinished Portrait *(1969)*
42. Last Laugh for the Baron *(1970)*
43. The Baron Goes A-Buying *(1971)*
44. The Baron and the Arrogant Artist *(1972)*
45. Burgle the Baron *(1973)*
46. The Baron - King Maker *(1975)*
47. Love for the Baron *(1979)*

## 'Department Z' Novels

*These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels*

1. The Death Miser *(1932)*
2. Redhead *(1934)*
3. First Came a Murder *(1934)*
4. Death Round the Corner *(1935)*
5. The Mark of the Crescent *(1935)*
6. Thunder in Europe *(1936)*
7. The Terror Trap *(1936)*
8. Carriers of Death *(1937)*
9. Days of Danger *(1937)*
10. Death Stands By *(1938)*
11. Menace! *(1938)*
12. Murder Must Wait *(1939)*
13. Panic! *(1939)*
14. Death by Night *(1940)*
15. The Island of Peril *(1940)*
16. Sabotage *(1941)*
17. Go Away Death *(1941)*
18. The Day of Disaster *(1942)*
19. Prepare for Action *(1942)*
20. No Darker Crime *(1943)*
21. Dark Peril *(1944)*
22. The Peril Ahead *(1946)*
23. The League of Dark Men *(1947)*
24. The Department of Death *(1949)*
25. The Enemy Within *(1950)*
26. Dead or Alive *(1951)*
27. A Kind of Prisoner *(1954)*
28. The Black Spiders *(1957)*

## Doctor Palfrey Novels

*These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels*

1. Traitor's Doom *(1942)*
2. The Legion of the Lost *(1943)*
3. The Valley of Fear *(The Perilous Country) (1943)*
4. Dangerous Quest *(1944)*
5. Death in the Rising Sun *(1945)*

6. The Hounds of Vengeance *(1945)*
7. Shadow of Doom *(1946)*
8. The House of the Bears *(1946)*
9. Dark Harvest *(1947)*
10. The Wings of Peace *(1948)*
11. The Sons of Satan *(1948)*
12. The Dawn of Darkness *(1949)*
13. The League of Light *(1949)*
14. The Man Who Shook the World *(1950)*
15. The Prophet of Fire *(1951)*
16. The Children of Hate *(The Killers of Innocence; The Children of Despair) (1952)*
17. The Touch of Death *(1954)*
18. The Mists of Fear *(1955)*
19. The Flood *(1956)*
20. The Plague of Silence *(1958)*
21. Dry Spell *(The Drought) (1959)*
22. The Terror *(1962)*
23. The Depths *(1963)*
24. The Sleep *(1964)*
25. The Inferno *(1965)*
26. The Famine *(1967)*
27. The Blight *(1968)*
28. The Oasis *(1970)*
29. The Smog *(1970)*
30. The Unbegotten *(1971)*
31. The Insulators *(1972)*
32. The Voiceless Ones *(1973)*
33. The Thunder-Maker *(1976)*
34. The Whirlwind *(1979)*

## Gideon Series

*(Writing as JJ Marric)*

*These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels*

1. Gideon's Day *(Gideon of Scotland Yard) (1955)*
2. Seven Days to Death *(Gideon's Week) (1956)*
3. Gideon's Night *(1957)*
4. A Backwards Jump *(Gideon's Month) (1958)*
5. Thugs and Economies *(Gideon's Staff) (1959)*
6. Gideon Combats Influence *(Gideon's Risk) (1960)*
7. Gideon's Fire *(1961)*

8. A Conference for Assassins *(Gideon's March) (1962)*
9. Travelling Crimes *(Gideon's Ride) (1963)*
10. An Uncivilised Election *(Gideon's Vote) (1964)*
11. Criminal Imports *(Gideon's Lot) (1965)*
12. To Nail a Serial Killer *(Gideon's Badge) (1966)*
13. From Murder to a Cathedral *(Gideon's Wrath) (1967)*
14. Gideon's River *(1968)*
15. Darkness and Confusion *(Gideon's Power) (1969)*
16. Sport, Heat & Scotland Yard *(Gideon's Sport) (1970)*
17. Gideon's Art *(1971)*
18. No Relaxation at Scotland Yard *(Gideon's Men) (1972)*
19. Impartiality Against the Mob *(Gideon's Press) (1973)*
20. Not Hidden by the Fog *(Gideon's Fog) (1975)*
21. Good and Justice *(Gideon's Drive) (1976)*
22. Vigilantes & Biscuits *(Gideon's Force) (1978)*

## Inspector West Series

*These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels*

1. Inspector West Takes Charge *(1942)*
2. Go Away to Murder *(Inspector West Leaves Town) (1943)*
3. An Apostle of Gloom *(Inspector West At Home) (1944)*
4. Inspector West Regrets *(1945)*
5. Holiday for Inspector West *(1946)*
6. Battle for Inspector West *(1948)*
7. The Case Against Paul Raeburn *(Triumph for Inspector West) (1948)*
8. Inspector West Kicks Off *(Sport for Inspector West) (1949)*
9. Inspector West Alone *(1950)*
10. Inspector West Cries Wolf *(The Creepers) (1950)*
11. The Figure in the Dusk *(A Case for Inspector West) (1951)*
12. The Dissemblers *(Puzzle for Inspector West) (1951)*
13. The Case of the Acid Throwers *(The Blind Spot; Inspector West at Bay) (1952)*
14. Give a Man a Gun *(A Gun for Inspector West) (1953)*
15. Send Inspector West *(1953)*
16. So Young, So Cold, So Fair *(A Beauty for Inspector West; The Beauty Queen Killer) (1954)*
17. Murder Makes Haste *(Inspector West Makes Haste; The Gelignite Gang; Night of the Watchman) (1955)*
18. Murder: One, Two, Three *(Two for Inspector West) (1955)*
19. Death of a Postman *(Parcels for Inspector West) (1956)*
20. Death of an Assassin *(A Prince for Inspector West) (1956)*
21. Hit and Run *(Accident for Inspector West) (1957)*

22. The Trouble at Saxby's *(Find Inspector West; Doorway to Death) (1957)*
23. Murder, London - New York *(1958)*
24. Strike for Death *(The Killing Strike) (1958)*
25. Death of a Racehorse *(1959)*
26. The Case of the Innocent Victims *(1959)*
27. Murder on the Line *(1960)*
28. Death in Cold Print *(1961)*
29. The Scene of the Crime *(1961)*
30. Policeman's Dread *(1962)*
31. Hang the Little Man *(1963)*
32. Look Three Ways at Murder *(1964)*
33. Murder, London - Australia *(1965)*
34. Murder, London - South Africa *(1966)*
35. The Executioners *(1967)*
36. So Young to Burn *(1968)*
37. Murder, London - Miami *(1969)*
38. A Part for a Policeman *(1970)*
39. Alibi for Inspector West *(1971)*
40. A Splinter of Glass *(1972)*
41. The Theft of Magna Carta *(1973)*
42. The Extortioners *(1974)*
43. A Sharp Rise in Crime *(1978)*

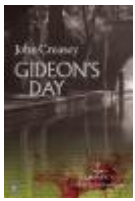
## 'The Toff' Series

*These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels*

1. Introducing the Toff *(It's the Toff!) (1938)*
2. The Toff Goes On *(1939)*
3. The Toff Steps Out *(1939)*
4. Here Comes the Toff *(1940)*
5. The Toff Breaks In *(1940)*
6. Salute the Toff *(1941)*
7. The Toff Proceeds *(1941)*
8. The Toff Goes to Market *(1942)*
9. The Toff Is Back *(1942)*
10. The Toff on the Trail *(short stories) (1942)*
11. The Toff among the Millions *(1943)*
12. Accuse the Toff *(1943)*
13. The Toff and the Deadly Priest *(The Toff and the Curate) (1944)*
14. The Toff and the Great Illusion *(1944)*
15. Feathers for the Toff *(1945)*
16. The Toff and the Lady *(1946)*

17. Poison for the Toff *(The Toff on Ice) (1946)*
18. Hammer the Toff *(1947)*
19. The Toff in Town *(1948)*
20. The Toff Takes Shares *(1948)*
21. The Toff and Old Harry *(1949)*
22. The Toff on Board *(1949)*
23. Fool the Toff *(1950)*
24. Kill the Toff *(1950)*
25. A Knife for the Toff *(1951)*
26. A Mask for the Toff *(The Toff Goes Gay) (1951)*
27. Hunt the Toff *(1952)*
28. Call the Toff *(1953)*
29. The Toff Down Under *(Break the Toff) (1953)*
30. Murder Out of the Past *(short stories) (1953)*
31. The Toff at Camp *(The Toff at Butlins) (1954)*
32. The Toff at the Fair *(1954)*
33. A Six for the Toff *(A Score for the Toff) (1955)*
34. The Toff and the Deep Blue Sea *(1955)*
35. Kiss the Toff *(Make-Up for the Toff) (1956)*
36. The Toff in New York *(1956)*
37. Model for the Toff *(1957)*
38. The Toff on Fire *(1957)*
39. The Toff and the Stolen Tresses *(1958)*
40. Terror for the Toff *(The Toff on the Farm) (1958)*
41. Double for the Toff *(1959)*
42. The Toff and the Runaway Bride *(1959)*
43. A Rocket for the Toff *(1960)*
44. The Toff and the Kidnapped *(The Kidnapped Child) (1960)*
45. Follow the Toff *(1961)*
46. The Toff and the Toughs *(The Toff and the Teds) (1961)*
47. A Doll for the Toff *(1963)*
48. Leave It to the Toff *(1963)*
49. The Toff and the Spider *(1965)*
50. The Toff in Wax *(1966)*
51. A Bundle for the Toff *(1967)*
52. Stars for the Toff *(1968)*
53. The Toff and the Golden Boy *(1969)*
54. The Toff and the Fallen Angels *(1970)*
55. Vote for the Toff *(1971)*
56. The Toff and the Trip-Trip-Triplets *(1972)*
57. The Toff and the Terrified Taxman *(1973)*
58. The Toff and the Sleepy Cowboy *(1975)*
59. The Toff and the Crooked Copper *(1977)*

# Select Synopses

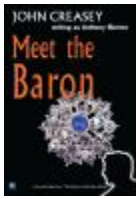



***Gideon's Day***
Gideon's day is a busy one. He balances family commitments with solving a series of seemingly unrelated crimes from which a plot nonetheless evolves and a mystery is solved. One of the most senior officers within Scotland Yard, George Gideon's crime solving abilities are in the finest traditions of London's world famous police headquarters. His analytical brain and sense of fairness is respected by colleagues and villains alike.

***Gideon's Night***
On this particular night Commander George Gideon has to deal with a couple of psychopaths who trail pain and blood in their wake. One targets infants, and the other young women on London's foggy streets. There's also an explosive gang war in the offing, and one way or another all of these cases are coming to their breathtaking conclusions at the same time. Can Scotland Yard's finest cope with such a nightmarish scenario, with what would ordinarily be months of time consuming police work crammed into just one night?

***Gideon's Fire***
Commander George Gideon of Scotland Yard has to deal successively with news of a mass murderer, a depraved maniac, and the deaths of a family in an arson attack on an old building south of the river. This leaves little time for the crisis developing at home . . .

***Meet the Baron***
John Mannering (*The Baron*) makes

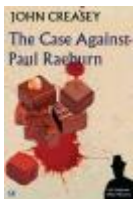



his first appearance in this volume. Lord Fauntley cannot help showing off both his daughter and the security under which his precious jewels are kept. Mannering finds himself attracted to both .... Money is tight and so he plans a burglary, but this fails and unexpected consequnces result. The relationship with Lorna Fauntley flourishes, and a series of high profile thefts and adventures ensure Mannering's future, so he believes, until Lorna equates him with *The Baron*. One of the many further twists in this award winning novel occurs when the police appear to seek Mannering's help, only to have everything turned upside down as the plot develops . . .

***Shadow The Baron***
John Mannering ('*The Baron*') is called in by Scorland Yard's Superintendent Bristow to help catch the mysterious jewel thief '*The Shadow*'. No one know the thief's identity, but he has managed to pull off many high profile robberies. However, as Mannering proceeds to track down the target, he finds the pursuer becomes the pursued . . . ..

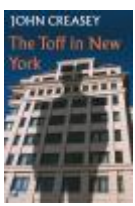
***The House of the Bears***
Standing alone in the bleak Yorkshire Moors is Sir Rufus Marne's *'House of the Bears'*. Dr. Palfrey is asked to journey there to examine an invalid - whom he finds has disappeared. Moreover, Marne's daughter lies terribly injured after a fall from the minstrel's gallery, which Dr. Palfrey discovers was no accident. He sets out to look into both matters, but the discoveries he makes are truly fantastic. A deserted mine, powerful explosive and a submarine all feature in this powerful mystery. The results are even capable of surprising him ...

***Inspector West Takes Charge***
Extortion is the name of the game, as one victim after another is ruthlessly targeted. Chief Inspector Roger West must now solve the problem, along with a tangle of murders - but the case becomes more frightening as every minute passes.




***The Case Against Paul Raeburn***
Chief Inspector Roger West has been watching and waiting for over two years - he is determined to catch Paul Raeburn out. The millionaire racketeer may have made a mistake, following the killing of a small time crook. Can the ace detective triumph over the evil Raeburn in what are very difficult circumstances? This cannot be assumed as not eveything, it would seem, is as simple as it first appears .....

***Introducing The Toff***
The Toff is the Hon. Richard Rollison; the ultimate sleuth who revels in solving crimes. Whilst returning home across the Essex countryside from a day's cricket at his father's Norfolk home, he happens upon an accident that sets him on a new trail. This involves murder, suspense and thrilling action as The Toff applies his mind with its usual precision and thoroughness.




***The Toff in New York***
*'Say, Miss Hall, I hope that brother of yours hasn't run into any trouble.'* But Will Hall had been kidnapped and the Honourable Richard Rollison, known by many by the apt if absurd soubriquet of the *'Toff'* is soon on the scene, but not before a murdered man had fallen into Valerie Hallís arms. There's lots of action in 'millionaire surroundings', with a rich private eye

and the NYPD all on the case, whilst the Toff tracks Dutch Himmy, surely the worst man in New York . . . ..

**www.houseofstratus.com**